

Hanafubuki

by iWandering-Shapeshifter

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Summary: it's been a year since the Shinsengumi came into being, now settled into their new position as the police force of Kyoto under the Aizu Clan. new troubles arise as the anti-foreigner Choshuus stir up trouble. will the Shinsengumi be able to stop them before a war breaks out; and will they truly live up to the name 'Wolves of Mibu? R/R plz; rated for lang and slight gore. Souji/OC.

1. Blooming

A/N: _this's a continuation of where '__**Gengetsu**__' left off after Serizawa was assassinated. it's still being told from Kawa's POV, and yes she's still with Souji ;D anyway, enjoy the chap!_

[_**edit**_: the title translates to '__**Flying Cherry Blossoms**__'_]

****disclaimer****:_ i don't own Hakuouki; Kawa belongs to me._

* * *

><p>Chapter One: Blooming**

A shiver crept up my spine.

I grimaced and snuggled deeper into the blankets, instantly cursing the cold front that had suddenly plagued the capital a few weeks ago.

>The shuffling of feet sounded from the back hallway behind my room before the door was opened a fraction.<p>

"Yasakawa-kun, are you awake? Breakfast is ready." A kindly male voice declared from the hall.

>I looked up slightly to see the kind brown eyes of Inoue Genzaburo looking into my room.<p>

"I'm getting there, Inoue-san. Thanks," I replied, smiling for him before watching him nod and close the door to let me get dressed in peace.

>A sigh escaped me as I reluctantly threw the blankets off, shivering and rubbing my arms.<p>

"Shit its cold," I muttered, straightening to my feet and shuffling to my closet to pull my regular clothes out.

I slipped out of the sleeping yukata and pulled on my white sleeveless kosode, tying the sash at my waist before slipping into my navy hakama; I tied the blue sash at my waist like a belt, stretching my arms to the ceiling and yawning.

Another shiver ran down my arms, reminding me of the disadvantage of wearing the sleeveless top; I grumbled under my breath as I looked through my closet for a haori to wear.

My eyes focused on a familiar haori: it was colored pale blue like the sky and had white triangles designed into the bottoms of the wide sleeves.

I smiled to myself at the sight, pulling out a gray haori that was folded next to it and shrugging my arms through the sleeves, closing the closet doors.

My katana and short sword stood against the wall space beside my closet; I smiled softly, slipping the short sword beneath the blue sash and carrying my katana in hand as I slid the door open to the courtyard.

I looked out at the white blanket of cold snow that had enveloped the ground and shivered a little, walking down the porch's raised pathway to the dining hall for breakfast.

It'd only been a year since we really got settled into living here in Kyoto.

>Of course a lot of things happened before we got settled, but that was something I tried to forget.<p>

If we focused too much on the past, we would be haunted by it forever.

Or at least that's what I thought on it, considering everything that'd happened.

>Either way, we were moving forward and even though progress was slow, we were getting somewhere; that was the important thing.<p>

Wasn't it?

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The door to the dining hall was closed when I got there.

>I looked at it and smiled to myself, exhaling before I reached for the door.<p>

"**Good morning, sunshine**~!" I declared as I threw the door open wide to let in the rush of cool air from the frozen courtyard as I

stood in the open doorway.

"Fer the love of God, close the damn door! It's freezingâ€¦!" A gruff bark sounded from inside.

>I looked at the owner of the gruff bark and met the slightly-annoyed blue stare of a spiky-haired brunette by the name of Nagakura Shinpachi.<p>

He blinked before his face split into a light smile, his blue eyes sheepish. "Oops, sorry! I didn't know it was you who did that, Kawa-chan!" He apologized, laughing weakly and lifting a muscled arm to rub the back of his neck.

I rolled my eyes at his apology, smirking. "It's alright, Shinpatsu, I don't blame you in the slightest." I replied, slipping inside and closing the door behind me as I shuffled inside to plop down across from the second-division captain.

A lanky arm draped across my shoulders before the owner pulled me close to kiss my forehead. "Mornin', beautiful," he smirked gently at me, his jade green eyes half-asleep and warm at the same time.

My cheeks warmed and I smiled up at the brunette named Okita Souji. "Morning, love," I replied, gently shirking free of his arm to turn to my food.

"Seriously, Souji, do we have to see you put the moves on Kawa so damn early in the morning?" A young voice wondered, perking my ears as I looked up at the annoyed teal blue eyes of the long-haired brunette Todou Heisuke, his eyes scowling over at Souji from above his nearly-finished meal.

Souji shot him a look. "If ya don't like it, eat in the corner, Heisuke," he remarked calmly, sipping his soup.

THWACK.

"Ow, what the hell, Sano-san!?" Heisuke yelped, rubbing the large bump on his head gingerly and scowling at the tall brunette to his right with scolding gold eyes as Shinpachi snickered.

Harada Sanosuke scowled patiently at the younger eighth-division captain, cracking his knuckles. "Idiot, show some manners, will ya? Just because y'don't understand love don't mean you've gotta rag on two people who're happy with each other." He scolded calmly, peeling his gold eyes away from the younger man to his food.

I swallowed a clump of rice, smiling sheepishly at him. "Good mornin' to you too, Sano," I said.

>Sano winked at me and smiled lightly. "'Morning to ya too, Kawa-chan," he replied.<p>

"Honestly, Harada-san, try not to flirt with Kawa this early in the morning; you're going to make Souji homicidal again." Saitou Hajime, a man with raven-black hair and cool blue eyes, advised calmly from sitting at my far right, looking up from sipping his tea.

Souji shot him a sore look. "Geez, way to ruin the fun, Hajime-kun!" He declared.

"Both of you knock it off. It's too damn early to hear you fighting over who gets to say 'hello' to my sister." My half-brother, a man with flowing jet black hair held in a ponytail and violet eyes by the name of Hijikata Toshizou, scowled sternly from both first and third division captains, his brow furrowed.

The man to his right, with spiked black hair and kind brown eyes, laughed sheepishly. "Honestly, Toshi, they were just playing around." Kondou Isami chided lightly.

"Kondou-san is right, Hijikata-kun; it's too early to hear you scolding the men, as well." A bespectacled man with brown hair and calm brown eyes by the name of Yamanami Keisuke (or "Sannan-san" as we all referred to him as) agreed, flashing a slight smile.

Toshi scowled slightly at being outnumbered before he huffed and returned to his food. "Fine," he grumbled in defeat.
>I smirked over at him. "What's with the long face, nii-san?" I wondered teasingly.<p>

"It's too early to hear you heckling ****me**** as well, Yasakawa." He remarked gruffly.

I sniffed. "I told you not to call me that; it's '****_Kawa_****'." I retorted, scowling at him before digging into my meal to keep from spouting further comments at him.

* * *

><p>"A witness?" I repeated, looking from my brother to Souji.<p>

Apparently they *â€*" that is to say, Toshi, Souji, and Saitou *â€*" had a run-in with a couple of Fury on the loose the night before; luckily they returned to headquarters unscathed, but when returning they brought along a witness who'd seen the blood-lusting Furies.

Memories of our first year in Kyoto flashed in my mind at the mention of those blood-drinking monsters; I lifted a hand to rub my right arm gingerly out of habit.

Toshi nodded, seeming to notice I'd grabbed my arm, looking away. "Inoue-san, bring him in." He said.

The door to the meeting room opened and Inoue-san stood there with a young faced man at his side, his wrists bound by ropes that were led by Inoue-san.

I blinked at seeing the boy, watching Inoue-san and the boy walk into the room and sit down before my brother, Kondou-san, and Sannan-san.

This kid looked familiar.

I looked at his sharp-yet-serious features, his dark cobalt eyes that showed no fear despite his situation, the mop of slightly messy black hair that was pulled back by a short ponytail; even though he was serious-looking, he was still young.

Probably my age, or even as young as Heisuke.

"I didn't see much, if that's what you're inferring." The boy declared in a bored tone, perking my ears and stirring me from my thoughts as I noticed Saitou had recounted the scene to him.

"The hell ya didn't; y'were aiding at least one of those things." Souji quipped from his post sitting at my side with his katana in his lap.

"No, I wasn't! What the hell's yer problem, blaming some stranger you barely know?" He snapped, breaking out of that bored tone and scowling over at his poker-face stare, his blue eyes sharp.

He snickered and smirked. "Feisty one, aren't you?" He wondered coolly, his green eyes nonchalant.

>I ribbed him. "Cut it out, will you? If he says he didn't see anything, he's probably telling the truth." I scolded wisely.<p>

The boy looked at me then, his cobalt eyes locking on my gray ones; he scowled. "Do I know you from somewhere?" He wondered.

I blinked before huffing. "Probably not, kid. Besides, you're not supposed to be asking the questions." I quipped cattily, crossing my arms at my chest.

>He scoffed, looking away. "Since when do they allow women into the infamous Shinsengumi?" He grumbled.<p>

Toshi glared at him, quieting the boy; leave it to Toshi to be able to scare the hell out of anyone with that face.

I looked at the boy, vaguely listening to my brother as he pointed out to the boy that he was to be taken back to the room they'd put him in, watching Saitou lift him to his feet by his arm and drag him out of the meeting room.

"Nii-san, what're you gonna do with him?" I asked calmly, looking at my brother.

He sighed quietly and his shoulders slumped a little. "Well, it's not as if we can let him free after being confined here. We can't allow him to leave after seeing the Fury, either." He mused.

"Then assign him to be someone's attendant or put him in someone's squad. If he's not allowed to leave then he might as well stay here." Souji commented, looking at my brother with one open green eye.

Toshi scowled reprovably. "Don't start with that, Souji," he began.

"For all I know, you're only saying that so you can get back at him for making that comment about women being in the Shinsengumi." I interjected, my elbow stabbing into his ribs again.

He smirked at me and slid his arm to hug my shoulders. "Y'always see right through me, love," he mused with a sigh.

>I rolled my eyes at him. "Shut up," I grumbled.<p>

"Regardless, Souji may have a point about keeping him here. The boy

doesn't look to be very skilled with a blade, but with training he might become something." Saitou mused as he reentered the meeting room, sitting down at my left.

"Well if he's not that skilled then why d'ya suggest he stay with us?" Shinpachi piped up, looking at Souji.

He shrugged, his green eyes looking stoic. "He claims he's seen Kawa before." He mused, perking my ears.

>I looked at him curiously, looking away.<p>

That kid did look familiar, I had to admit. But where I knew him from, I hadn't a clue...

"Yasakawa-kun, do you know that boy?" Sannan-san asked quietly, stirring me from my thoughts.

I ignored the questioning look my brother shot, shrugging. "He seemed familiar. I mean, I did fight a lot of boys at my old dojo, but I hardly remember anything past the name-calling and curses they'd shot after losing." I explained, shrugging my katana against my right shoulder and mirroring Souji.

Toshi sighed. "If that's the case, then until you remember who he is from your childhood, he's staying here. If you don't remember him, we'll kill him. If you do, we'll think of something." He stated.

I looked at him and nodded, sighing. "Sounds fair enough." I mused, letting the meeting dismiss before I straightened to my feet and stretched my arms.

>I hoisted my katana over my shoulder, exiting the room through the door leading to the courtyard and heading out onto the porch.

Shuffling feet sounded before Souji caught up to me wordlessly, looking down at me with a smirk.

I looked up at him curiously. "Doesn't your patrol start soon?" I wondered.

"Yep, in a few minutes. Hijikata-san said you could come, though," he mused, perking my ears.

>I blinked. "I thought he didn't want me to leave headquarters," I began.<p>

He shrugged. "Dunno what changed his mind, but I guess he's going easy on ya because of that kid." He replied.

I raised a brow before smiling slightly, nodding. "Guess so." I ran a hand through my hair, sighing. "I'll meet you at the front gates, I've gotta get my coat." I excused, smiling up at him.

Souji smirked gently and pulled on my waist, kissing me. "Don't take too long, princess," he requested, making me blush at having him kiss me in the open.

I kissed back and smiled, punching him. "Don't rush perfection," I remarked with a wink, slipping free to rush to my room and grab my haori.

.....oOo.....

It hadn't snowed much in town.

I walked at Souji's left, ignoring the various looks we gained from the villagers.

He glanced at me and smiled a little. "So you seriously don't remember that kid?" He asked.

I was wondering when he was gonna ask the inevitable question.
>I shrugged. "I'm trying to remember. Like I said, there were too many boys that it's hard to remember each one I beat." I replied quietly.<p>

Souji sniffed. "Y'make 'em sound like they fought like little girls." He mused, perking my ears.

I smirked and shrugged again. "They might as well have been." I replied.

He sighed and ran a hand through my hair. "Either way, if you do remember that kid, at least your brother will prolly let him stick around. Y'know we're always lookin' for recruits." He reasoned.

I nodded and smiled up at him. "Yeah, you've got a point." I replied, rubbing the back of my neck before looking away as I tried to recall that boy's face.

.....Flashback:.....

'C'mon, let's see what you can do!' A boy called.

'Kawa-san,' the boy with cobalt blue eyes and messy black hair tugged on the sleeve of my training

kosode_, his eyes concerned._

I'd smiled lightly at him, gently shirking free of his grip on my sleeve. 'It's okay, Kisuke-kun, I'm gonna be fine!' I'd declared, sprinting forward to fight the boy who'd called me forward to spar.

'Begin!' My dojo sensei called as we started to spar, the

shinai _clashing loudly in the training
hallâ€|_

.....End-o'-Flashback:.....

"Kawa," he poked my cheek.

I blinked before shaking my head fervently, looking up at his green eyes to see there was a hint of concern in his stare; I smiled sheepishly. "Sorry, spaced out for a moment." I apologized.

Kisukeâ€| that's what his name was?

Now I remembered!

Kisuke had been my friend in the dojo, only on account of his being too stubborn to not give up in a spar; was it possible that he had a crush on me, when we were kids?

"Souji, I remember now," I declared, perking his ears.

Souji blinked before he smiled slightly. "Hell, at least it didn't take long for you to remember." He mused.

>I nodded. "I know; I'll tell Toshi when we get back," I agreed.<p>

He smiled again and looked forward. "Good, that just means we can kill him a lot sooner than expected," he mused lightly.

I raised a brow before sweatdropping and sighing, punching his arm.

>"Ow, hey!" He griped, looking at me sorely.<p>

I crossed my arms in the sleeves of my uniform coat. "Give it a rest," I scolded.

Souji huffed and pouted, looking away. "Fine," he grumbled.

>I looked at him and smiled to myself, giggling.<p>

No matter what, Souji was still cute when he pouted.

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><p>AN: _so yeah, hope you enjoyed the first chap. _

__**Souji**_: oi, __*_review_*_ Porcelain-chan's fic! i'll hafta kill ya otherwise~ __/winks_

2. Blooming Pt 02: Reborn Ties

A/N: _someone witnessed the slaying of two rogue Fury. how will the gang handle it: and how does he know Kawa? _

>enjoy the chap!

__**disclaimer**_: _i don't own Hakuouki; Kawa and Kisuke belong to me._

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><p>Chapter Two: Blooming Part 02 - Reborn Ties

Toshi looked at me with a raised brow. "'Kisuke'?" He repeated.

>I nodded. "Yeah. Actually, I think he was the only boy there that didn't hate my guts." I replied.<p>

"That makes sense, from what you've told us about your dojo days." Kondou-san commented thoughtfully.

"So now what're you gonna do, Hijikata-san?" Souji asked from sitting behind me, making me glance over my shoulder to see he was sitting in the exact same position as at the earlier meeting this morning; he caught my gaze and winked, making me smirk.

"If he doesn't run the first chance he gets, he's allowed to stay. Though as to Souji's proposition of him being placed in someone's squad, I feel it'd be much easier to place him in the first." Toshi stated.

Souji nodded his head until he blinked. "_**What**__?_" He balked, looking at my brother incredulously.

Saitou smirked wryly at his friend. "I concur with Hijikata-san; it'd make it a lot easier to train the boy if he's under Souji's tutelage." He agreed in that calm voice of his.

"H-hey, whose friggin' side are you on, Hajime-kun!?" Souji barked, shooting him a death glare.

>I couldn't help but giggle at his distraught face. "I completely agree with Saitou-kun." I amended lightly.<p>

"Kawa, not you tooâ€|!" He groaned.

I snickered and straightened to my feet. "I'll go tell him, then. Saitou-kun, since Souji is as distraught as ever, y'mind?" I asked innocently, looking at the blue-eyed third division captain.

Saitou spared Souji a glance and ignored the hurt scowl shot in his direction before he nodded, smiling a little. "Not in the slightest," he replied, straightening as well before we left the meeting room to go tell Kisuke.

As soon as we were down the porch his shoulders sagged a little. "What possessed you to drag me with you to go see your friend?" He asked curiously, his blue eyes penetrating past the locks of raven-black hair that shielded the right side of his face.

I shrugged. "If I'd brought Souji that would only cause trouble because he's still pissy about being assigned to 'babysit' Kisuke. Or in Souji's case, bloodshed." I explained, glancing at him.

Saitou Hajime, even though I first found him to be really handsome, was my friend.

>I'd admired and slightly envied his skill with a blade after watching him and Souji spar when he first joined the Shinsengumi, but it only proved to make me train harder so I could be just as strong one day.
He was a good listener if I ever needed to talk something out with someone other than Souji, and he was wise for his age (which, I learned, was only a year older than my humble age of twenty-one).

"You've got a point." He mused quietly.

I gently nudged him. "Besides, when it comes to the essence of calmness, you're pretty much the only man I can trust who'll maintain his cool in a situation." I admitted, perking his ears.

Saitou blinked before he glanced away, the faintest hint of rosiness staining his cheeks at my compliment. "Honestly, Kawa," he grumbled.

I smiled slightly and looked away, crossing my arms in the sleeves of my _haori_. "I'm just saying the truth, Saitou-kun." I remarked.

He made a face, lifting a hand to ruffle my hair. "The truth, even though it's kind of you to admit that, can probably get you in trouble later on." He pointed out.

I sweatdropped and rolled my eyes. "If you say so," I mused with a sigh.

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The late afternoon daylight streamed into the room.

He blinked back the light from his blue eyes before registering Saitou and I standing in the doorway; his eyes narrowed. "Come to take me to my execution?" He wondered, his voice almost a sneer.

I furrowed my brow at hearing that tone; _Kisuke, what happened to make you change?_ I wondered as we entered the room, Saitou at my back as we both sat down before him.

Kisuke had stretched out, almost as tall as Souji, most of his height being in his lanky legs, I noticed; I smiled inwardly as I remembered we were the same height when we were both twelve.

"Ichinose Kisuke, it's been a while." I spoke calmly, perking his ears.

His cobalt eyes widened a fraction before they narrowed again. "How the hell d'ya know my name?" He asked cautiously.

I smiled this time and undid the bun I'd pulled my hair into, holding it up in a high ponytail. "Y'don't remember me? We both sparred at Reishin Dojo, when we were kidsâ€¦ back in Edo." I wondered, locking gaze with his slowly widening cobalt blue stare.

Kisuke's mouth was agape. "Kawa-sanâ€¦?" He wondered softly.

I beamed and laughed softly. "Kisuke-kun," I replied as I dropped my hair and let it fall down to mid-back.

He looked surprised for another moment before a soft grin formed on his lips. "It really has been a long time. I wondered where you moved to, after our sensei passed." He mused, lowering his gaze at the memory.

I nodded and then shrugged, smiling slightly. "I lived with that temple that was a few blocks away from the dojo. My half-brother, he took me in a few months later." I explained.

Kisuke's jaw dropped again. "Seriously? I didn't know you had a sibling. Who is heâ€¦?" He asked, seeming to think about which one of the men in the Shinsengumi I was related to.

"Hijikata Toshizou." I said; he balked.

"That guy!?" He quieted and threw a glance at Saitou as I felt him stiffen for a moment, looking at me again. "I thought I saw the resemblance, y'know, with your hairâ€¦ But him? He's actually kind of scary, Kawa-san," he muttered the last bit.

I laughed quietly and smirked. "Yeah, he can be a bit intimidating when you first meet him. But Toshi'sâ€¦ well, he's not bad. He's kind of ass sometimes." I admitted.

Saitou had to fight a wry smirk at my comment, looking at Kisuke. "Ichinose-san, it has been decided that you're to stay here within our headquarters, by Hijikata-san. Also, you're to report to First Squad Captain Okita Souji tomorrow morning for training, as he will see to your training practice." He informed calmly, stirring his attention.

Kisuke lifted a dark brow before he glanced at me. "That soundsâ€¦ fair. Thank you for accepting me into your ranks," he said, seeming to swallow any comments he thought to voice, bowing his head respectfully.

Saitou returned the bow and looked to me. "Dinner should be ready soon." He mused, perking my ears.

I nodded and looked at Kisuke, smiling. "C'mon, Kisuke-kun, I'll introduce you to the others." I declared, straightening to my feet as Saitou also straightened, Kisuke following suit.

"I never caught your name," he mused to Saitou as we exited the room and headed down the porch to the dining hall, Saitou and Kisuke at my back as I took the lead.

"Saitou Hajime, the Third Squad Captain." He replied.

Kisuke seemed to smile. "No wonder you looked familiar; I'd heard about you back in Edo, before I came to the capital. It's nice to meet you." He said.

I smiled at their exchange of pleasantries, remembering that when we were kids, Kisuke was as stubborn-willed in our sparring matches, but despite that he was a nice boy and he did happen to worry over me whenever one of the older boys challenged me to a duel.

Kisuke, you haven't changed a lot, have you? I thought.

The dining room was lively with chatter from the three baboons' side of the room.

>"Yo, so Kisuke-san, how long've ya known our sword princess?"
Shinpachi called, stirring his attention from talking with
Saitou.<p>

Kisuke shrugged, looking at me as I sat closest to Souji. "Well, we met back in Edo, when Kawa-san was sevenâ€¦" He guessed.

>"Aww how cute, a little version of Kawa-chan!" Sano teased with a grin.<p>

I threw my fish skeleton at him. "_Bakkerō_", shut up!" I barked, blushing a shade of pink as he, Heisuke and Shinpachi laughed.

Souji chuckled at my side. "I can imagine ya were just as much of a spitfire at that age," he mused lightly, sipping his _sake_.

>I blushed again and punched him, crossing my arms over my chest.
"Don't get me started with you, mister," I growled.<p>

He snickered, his green eyes glittering; he sighed lightly and

ruffled my hair, smirking. "Too late; ya already stole my heart, princess," he remarked slyly.

My cheeks burned again and I spluttered a huff, downing my own shot of _sake_. "You're such a leech," I grumbled, looking away.

Souji smiled and wrapped an arm around my shoulders, his green eyes warm and playful when I looked up at him. "Just with you, Kawa," he replied calmly.

I huffed and gently shirked out of his grip, rolling my eyes.
>"I'm surprised Hijikata-san isn't here," Kisuke mused near me, perking my ears.<p>

"He's off to Osaka with Sannan-san; they'll be back in a few days." Saitou informed calmly.
>I smiled a little at the reminder, looking at Saitou and Kisuke as they started on another conversation; they kind of look alike, I thought.

"Talk about twins." Souji commented at my side, stirring my attention.
>I nodded, resting my cheek on his shoulder. "Yeah, I know." I mused.<p>

He looked at me and smiled warmly, slinging his arm around my waist.

* * *

><p>The sound of shinai clashing rang in the air.

I paused short of the training hall doorway to see Souji sparring against Kisuke, the wooden blades disengaging and then clashing, a loud '_clack_' ringing in the stale winter air.

A smile formed on my lips as I slipped inside the training hall, leaning against the doorway and watching them spar.

Kisuke hadn't lost his touch. He was still stubborn-willed in a match, that familiar determined light that used to shine in his eyes at a younger age never wavering. Of course he'd gotten taller since then, but he wasn't an amateur like when we were in Edo.

The sound of someone being knocked down stirred me from my thoughts; I looked up to see Kisuke on the floor, Souji's _shinai_ tip aimed at his adam's apple.

Point, I thought, watching Kisuke scowl in a determined way before pushing the _shinai_ away, sitting up.

"You're not bad. With a bit more training, y'could be able to beat someone like Heisuke." Souji praised, pulling away and resting the _shinai_ over his right shoulder casually.

Kisuke huffed and straightened to his feet, coming to " as I figured " an inch or two short of Souji's forehead, a wry smirk on his mouth. "Thanks for training with me." He replied.

Souji made a face slightly before he returned the huff. "Don't

mention it, kid. Oi, so what didja think, Kawa-chan?" He called, perking my ears.

Damn you, Souji, I thought, meeting Kisuke's blue eyes before I shrugged and peeled myself away from the doorway to walk forward. "Your deducing wasn't far off the mark, love. Keep getting stronger and you'll be able to patrol with us." I added to Kisuke, taking Souji's _shinai_ from his hand and holding it lightly.

Souji smirked and wrapped his arm around my waist possessively, pulling me to his hip. "Speakin' of which, Sano-san said you were going with his squad and Hajime-kun's, today." He reminded, perking my ears again.

I blinked before smiling lightly. "Great," I reached to kiss him lightly before slipping free of his grip on my waist to leave him and Kisuke. "In that case, I'd better get ready. Try not to kill each other, you two." I called over my shoulder.

Souji chuckled behind me. "I'll help ya with that, Kawa-chan," he mused lightly before he shuffled to come to my side.

I looked up at him curiously before smirking as he sidled up to my side, pulling me to his hip again. "Afraid you were actually gonna kill Kisuke?" I wondered of him.

He scoffed and then smirked back, squeezing my waist. "I didn't get my morning kiss." He mused almost in a croon.

>My cheeks warmed as we paused short of my room, sliding the door open as I went inside to grab my haori and headband.

Souji waited until I pulled my _haori_ out of the closet, slipping my arms through the wide sleeves; he smirked when I turned to him, arms at his chest dropping as he walked forward.

Once again, I blushed slightly as I noticed he was almost too tall for my small room, looking up when he cupped my cheek.

"Y'still look ten times as gorgeous in that shade of blue," he mused softly, his green eyes warm and glittering, as he tilted my chin up to incline his head and kiss me.

>I shivered slightly and held onto him, pulling him close as my arms folded on the back of his neck.<p>

Damn it, no matter how many years we were together, Souji always made me melt with just one kiss.

Souji grinned warmly against my lips, his fingers running through my thick hair as he deepened the kiss a fraction, his teeth gently nibbling on my lower lip.

I squeaked slightly when he squeezed the small of my back, hearing a soft chuckle rumble in his chest at my noise, running my fingers through his brown hair.

Someone cleared their throat at the door of my room, making us pull apart a little.

I looked to see Saitou Hajime standing there, dressed for his patrol, his blue eyes patient and expectant at the same time.

>"Kawa, you ready?" He asked.<p>

Souji shot his friend a glare at his untimely intrusion, squeezing my hips before letting me go. "Don't go tryin' anything on my girl, Hajime-kun," he warned playfully, the glare being replaced with a smirk.

THWACK.

"What did I say about referring to me as '_your girl_', Souji?" I wondered as I finished fixing my headband, cracking my knuckles as he held his bleeding nose.

Saitou seemed to laugh on the inside at the sight. "I'll do my best to bring her back in one piece, Souji," he mused calmly, walking away from the doorway after nodding to me.

"Geez, that hurt," he grumbled behind me, his voice nasal.

I laughed softly, patting his cheek. "I'll be back. Like I said, play nice with Kisuke-kun." I reminded gently.

>Souji pouted, earning another laugh, before he flashed his cat-like smile and made an 'X' over his heart. "Will do; though if he dies, it's not my fault." He assured me.

I rolled my eyes knowingly and reached to kiss him sweetly. "Love you." I added quietly.

Souji's green eyes brightened before softening again; he tucked a few strands of hair behind my left ear. "Love you, too." He replied.

I smiled and stroked his cheek again before pulling away to slip my _katana_ into my sash next to my short sword, trotting down the porch to meet with Saitou and Sano at the front gates.

"Geez, Saitou-kun, I didn't know you were that lewd." I mused as we set out, walking at his right.

Saitou smirked wryly at me. "I didn't think he was trying to eat your face off," he remarked.

>I laughed softly and elbowed him. "Shut up," I scolded.<p>

"Oi, don't you two go getting cozy up there, Kawa-chan!" Sano called from the back.

I stuck my tongue out at the lanky captain. "Stow it, Sano." I shot back.

>He laughed lightly.<p>

* * *

><p>AN: _and so enter the new recruit, Ichinose Kisuke. i was kind of stuck with trying to pick a first name for him, so it took me a day or so to figure out what to name him. i admire Urahara Kisuke from BLEACH, so i felt like naming him 'Kisuke'. _

>anyway, that's all for now. i'll update soon!

Saito: Porcelain-san requests that you review please. thank you /_bows_

3. Blooming Pt 03: Fearlessly Uneven Snow

A/N: _i apologize for not updating soon! got busy and everyone here knows how that is right? either way, i apologize for not updating sooner. /bows_

okay other than that... so where we last left off, Kisuke had been introduced and was undergoing training by Souji, rather reluctantly on Souji's part. will they refrain from killing each other? also, i finally introduce the young heroine of the series in this chap. enjoy!

****disclaimer****: _i don't own Hakouki; Kawa and Kisuke belong to me._

* * *

><p>Chapter Three: Blooming Part 03: Fearlessly Uneven Snowfall**

So far nothing was out of the ordinary around here.

>"Leave me alone!" A girl's voice sounded from one alley, perking my ears as well as Sano's and Saitou's.<p>

Apparently I spoke too soon.

I looked to see three ronin had cornered a tomboyish girl with brown hair and brown eyes, her eyes frightened and angered at the same time as she was backed against a wall; the sight of a short sword at her left hip caught my attention.

"Aww c'mon, girlie, we just wanna talk!" One of the ronin jeered as his two friends snickered.

>"Yeah, now are yer services available or do we need to "negotiate"?" Another of the trio asked slyly.<p>

I heard Saitou sigh quietly behind me as I walked forward. "Kawaâ€|" He began.

"You can negotiate in hell!" The girl snapped, her voice raised an octave in her nervousness.

"Three sons of pigs picking on a girl in broad daylight? _Man_, you guys really need to _grow a pair_" I declared loudly, jerking the trio's attention away from the girl and to me as I stood before them with a hand on my hip and a scowl on my brow.

The tallest of the trio sniffed and glared at me, his brown eyes tightening as he took in my uniform. "Get lost, bitch; go play samurai with some bratâ€|!" He snarled.

I huffed and smirked wryly. "Talk about a coward, not wantin' to get his ass kicked by a woman." I remarked.

"You bitch," he growled as he took the bait and flew at me.

I sighed and slipped my _katana_ free from my sash, ramming the sheath into his gut; the ronin sputtered and fell over, small bits of dust flying when he hit the ground.

"Damn bitch!" His two friends rushed me.

"Look out!" The girl exclaimed as she appeared at my side, sword drawn.

I widened my eyes slightly. "Idiot, get out of the way!" I began to bark before the sound of two bodies flopping onto the ground jerked our attention to see the two ronin had been knocked out as well, the sight of Saitou and Sano standing before us an indication they'd done it.

"I coulda handled it," I grumbled as I slipped my katana back into my sash.

>Saitou looked at me and smirked slightly. "Before or after they'd have cut you down?" He wondered.<p>

I huffed and scowled at him, looking at the girl as she sheathed her sword quietly. "That was very reckless, jumping into a fight like that." I pointed out, perking her ears.

She looked at me with slightly wide brown eyes before they narrowed into a frown. "They started it! It wasn't my fault, they just ganged up on me." She defended.

I raised a brow before folding my arms across my chest. "Then where did you get that sword?" I asked, indicating the short sword at her left hip.

The girl lowered her gaze to the sword, fingering the hilt. "It was my father, left it to me. Before he disappeared." She informed, perking my ears.

The brow remained raised. "Your father; what was his name?" I asked slowly, recalling the earlier incident during the year with Yukimura Kodou disappearing after a fire had ravaged the clinic he worked at.

"Yukimura Kodou." She replied.

>I widened my eyes slightly.<p>

"Excuse me, but are you his daughter?" Saitou asked, stirring her attention away from me.

She nodded. "Hai. My name's Yukimura Chizuru." She said.

Saitou and I exchanged a look before he met her brown eyes again. "Yukimura Chizuru, would you mind coming with us? We worked with your father, and we've been looking for him." He requested.

She nodded, bowing her head respectfully. "Thanks for saving me, back there." She declared, flashing a slight smile at both him and Sano as Sano's squad came to round up the three unconscious ronin.

Saitou elbowed me. "It wasn't my idea, it was this one." He replied with a shrug.

>I scowled slightly at him before looking at the girl and smiling sheepishly. "Kind of an instinct, I guess. Sorry." I admitted.<p>

She returned the sheepish smile. "It's fine, really! I, I didn't mean to snap at you like that." She replied.
>I shrugged. "It's alright, it's something I woulda done." I mused.<p>

This girl, did she know where Kodou-san was? And why was she in Kyoto?

:::::::::oOo:::::::::

Kondou-san balked slightly. "You're Kodou-san's little girl?" He asked her.

Chizuru nodded. "Yes, I've been looking for my father for a few months now. He stopped writing me as of a few months ago and I decided to come look for him here in Kyoto." She replied.

"That must've been rough," he mused sympathetically.

"What all do you know of your father?" Toshi asked suspiciously, perking her ears.

She looked at him in confusion. "Like what? Did something happen to my father?" She asked alertly, worry written in her brown gaze.

"A few months ago, a fire started at the clinic your father worked in. As I mentioned earlier, we've also been on the lookout for him. We haven't seen hide of him yet." Saitou spoke up, directing her attention to his calm blue eyes.

She lowered her gaze to the dark brown fabric of her hakama, her gaze sombering. "I see." She mumbled.

"If you like, you'd be more than welcome to stay here and help us look for your father." Kondou-san offered, earning a look from both Toshi and Sannan-san.

"Kondou-san," Toshi began alertly.

"Kondou-san, we don't have enough room to support another person living with usâ€|" Sannan-san began to reason.

"She can bunk with me." I offered calmly, jerking both sets of eyes to me.

I looked at the girl and smiled slightly, turning my gaze to my brother. "I wouldn't mind. Besides, in a compound full of men, it wouldn't be fitting to place her in the same sleeping quarters, would it?" I reasoned.

Toshi's violet eyes hardened a little at hearing me take up such a responsibility before he sighed.

>"Very well, since you're so insistent. You will stay with Yasakawa while we search for your father. Is that understood, Yukimura?" He stated, looking to the girl's brown gaze.<p>

Chizuru nodded and smiled gratefully, bowing slightly. "Understood; thank you very much for letting me stay here!" She declared.

"So I guess we're supposed ta treat you the same as we do with

Kawa-chan?" Heisuke wondered from the corner he, Sano and Shinpachi sat at, making her look over at him.

"Yes, you are. If y'get rough I'm gonna have to kick your asses for it, too." I answered knowingly, crossing my arms in the sleeves of my haori.

Souji smirked from sitting at my side as we both sat against the wall. "Calm down, mother bear; s' not like the boys are gonna hurt the girl in her sleep." He teased.

I blushed and shot him a look. "That goes triple for you too, you pervert." I warned, poking his chest with an index finger.
>He rolled his eyes and took my hand calmly, squeezing my fingers.
"Whatever ya say, love," he mused lightly.<p>

"Yasakawa, would you kindly show our guest her sleeping quarters?" Toshi spoke up, stopping me from firing a remark at Souji and making us both look at him.

I nodded and pecked Souji on the cheek, straightening to my feet as Chizuru also stood, carrying her short sword. "C'mon, Chizuru, I'll show you where to put your things." I offered, throwing Toshi a look before ushering the girl to the door.

She nodded. "Okay. Thanks again!" She added over her shoulder as we exited through the door leading to the courtyard before closing it and heading down the porch to my room.

I sighed once we were far enough from the meeting room, lifting a hand to rub the back of my neck. "Sorry if the guys seem to be total idiots. They're always like that," I apologized, stirring her attention from looking at the slushy snow that covered the ground.

"Oh, it's alright. I think they're funny," she replied, waving it off.
>I blinked before smiling at her, folding my arms in the sleeves of my gray haori. "So are you an only child?" I wondered.

Chizuru nodded. "Yeah. I dunno if you're an only child, either. Hijikata-san looks like he's related somehow." She mused.

I shrugged. "I was, until a year ago. Toshi, he took me in, after my mother passed away a few months before he found me." I explained.

She raised a brow. "So are you adopted, or?" She began.
>"No, he's my half-brother." I replied, perking her ears.<p>

Chizuru nodded and looked at the cold courtyard. "Wow, that's pretty lucky that you were taken in by him." She admitted.
>I smiled thoughtfully and nodded. "I suppose so, yeah." I muttered.<p>

"Yasakawa-chan," she began.

"It's 'Kawa'." I interjected quietly.

"Right, sorry. Kawa-chan, are you and Okita-san together?" She asked, perking my ears.

My cheeks colored slightly and I looked at her. "What made you think that?" I returned.

She shrugged, her brown eyes locking on my gray. "It's just, he was sitting so close to you, as if he was protective of you. And he doesn't seem like he would try and charm me the way he tries to charm you." She pointed out.

I looked away and smiled slightly. "Yeah, we're together. Souji's kind of a moron, but he's got a good heart, and he may seem a bit overbearing but he means well. He loves me, so I don't complain about him." I mused.

Chizuru smiled as well and laughed quietly. "Kawa-chan, you love him too, right?" She guessed.

I chuckled and smiled at her, ruffling her brown hair. "Yeah, I do." I smiled again and glanced at the short sword she held at her side.

>"So do you know how to wield that sword?" I wondered, perking her ears. "I know you pulled it out pretty quick back on the street, but I'm just curious if you know how to fight." I asked, meeting her brown stare.<p>

She looked at the sword as well and shrugged. "Guess I ****was**** pretty reckless, back there." She laughed weakly. "But I know the basics, I did attend a dojo for a while when I was younger." She explained.

I raised a brow. "Really? Huh, cool. If you ever want to spar, I'll be happy to be your partner." I replied.

Chizuru blinked before she smiled, nodding. "Thanks for the offer," she said.

I shrugged as we appeared at my door, sliding it open to let her go in first before I followed.

"No problem. Girls gotta stick together, right?" I mused, pulling out the second futon from my closet and unfolding it next to mine, flattening it before pulling a second sleeping yukata from beneath the folded haori I kept, tossing it to her. "That's yours, as is the futon." I informed as she caught it expertly.

She nodded, placing the yukata down on the futon along with her short sword. "Thanks," she replied.

I smiled lightly. "No problem, again." I replied, looking at her garb that consisted of a faded red kosode and dark brown hakama, a white sash tied at her small waist, the men's clothing almost swallowing her petite frame in the folds.

This girl didn't deserve to be in an environment filled with so many men. But then again, it's not like I deserved to be here, eitherâ€¦|

Someone knocked on the doorway of my room before I saw his familiar lanky figure leaning against the door. "Dinner's ready if you two

lovely ladies are done chattering," he announced, his green eyes meeting my gaze with a calm smile.

I nodded and smirked back, letting the girl exit first before I walked towards him. "Such manners coming from a pervert like yourself," I teased as we walked after her lead.

Souji rolled his eyes and slung his arm around my hips. "I ain't ever heard ya complain about my mannerisms, in such a way; **I'm hurt, Kawa-chan**!" He exclaimed, draping his free arm over his brow in mock dramatics that made Chizuru giggle.

I laughed, smirking up at him and bumping his hip with mine. "Get over it, will you?" I chided patiently.

He chuckled and returned the smirk, squeezing my hips. "No can do; y'stole my poor heart so don't expect me to ever get over a gorgeous princess like ya, Kawa." He sighed.

I blushed humbly and smiled fondly, blowing strands of hair from my forehead before they flopped back in place. "Such a charmer," I muttered.

>Souji tucked a strand of hair behind my ear, kissing my temple. "Just for you, love; always for you." He replied.<p>

I blushed again and smiled softly, sighing. "I know." I mused.

'_Always for you_.'

You've always been for me, Souji, ever since we met a year ago That's why I love you_, I thought with an inward smile.

* * *

><p>He sidestepped my swing, letting me stumble a little as I skidded onto the training hall's floor.<p>

I felt the air connect with his _shinai_ as he made to claim his victory; I whirled around in time, blocking him with my own wooden sword, surprising him.

He smirked and shoved against me, forcing me back, before he swung at me rather sharply; I rolled under him, propelling a foot into his ass and kicking him away.

"Oi that hurt, Kawa!" He griped, rubbing his ass gingerly and pouting at me.

I huffed and smirked at him, straightening and hoisting the _shinai_ over my shoulder. "Quit whining and come at me." I teased, winking.

>Souji's pout shifted into a slight scowl before he lunged, swinging the shinai overhead.

I caught his descending blade, grunting softly and disengaging the blades sharply so the _shinai_ flew out of his hands.

He blinked back surprise at seeing me knock his blade out of his hands, his eyes going cross-eyed when the tip of my _shinai_ pointed

at his nose.

I panted slightly, scowling stubbornly up at his green stare.

Shoulders sagging, he sighed. "Point." He declared, seeming to swallow his pride at permitting me to win against him.
>I drew the shinai back to my side, smirking at him. "S' about time I win at _something_," I mused.

Souji pouted, his right eye twitching. "Don't press your luck, babe, or I'll hafta kill ya." He warned cattily.

I chuckled, reaching on my tiptoes to kiss his nose, seeing him wrinkle his nose and make me laugh at how cute he looked, patting his cheek. "You love me as much as I love you so I doubt you'd pull it off." I reminded coyly.

He let the subject drop at my words and sighed, lifting a hand to ruffle my hair. "Got me there, princess," he mused.
>I smiled and stroked his cheek gently. "Don't I always?" I wondered.<p>

Souji scoffed and then flashed his cat-like smile, holding my hand to his cheek. "The jury's still out on that." He remarked.

I pouted and sniffed, looking away. "You're still mean," I scolded, hating it that he managed to ruin my ego-boosting moment basically single-handedly.

He chuckled and tilted my chin up, green eyes warm. "I wouldn't have chased ya fer a whole year just to be mean, princess," he reminded gently.

I blushed humbly and watched his lips descend on mine, kissing me; I folded my arms on the back of his neck, kissing back.

Souji chuckled before he kissed again, hoisting me into his arms; I yelped when he carried me over his shoulder, walking out of the training hall.
>"D-damn it, put me down, Souji!" I protested, yelping slightly when his ever-idle hand groped my ass and he walked down the porch.<p>

"No can do, princess," he sighed, seeming to be going in the direction of my room.

I blushed slightly as I thought of what he wanted to do, draping my arms down his back in reluctant defeat. "You're still acting like a caveman," I grumbled.

He slid my door open with one hand, carrying me inside before lowering a little to the floor and setting me down.
>I stumbled a little, looking at him confusedly. "Why'd you bring me back to my room?" I asked curiously.<p>

"Patrols start soon, and you're with me today. Get dressed; I'd hate to have some cheap shit-faced ronin try and cut ya down if yer not wearin' the uniform." Souji explained, ducking to kiss me lovingly before pulling away. "I'll meet you back here in a couple of

minutes." He added, smiling his cat smile he knew I loved before he turned to trot to his own room.

I watched him leave and sighed, undoing the bun I'd put my hair in for practice and letting my hair down as I pulled my haori out and slipped my arms through the sleeves, pulling the headband out; I used the blue hair-tie to put my hair back into a high ponytail, pulling the headband on and tying the ribbons at the back of my head.

Not once in my childhood did I ever think I'd be a part of something as strong as the Shinsengumi. I knew I'd have made my father proud, if I'd ever met him.

I slipped my short sword and katana into the blue sash at my waist, heading out of the room and perking up as I almost had a head-on collision with Chizuru.

"Sorry, Chizu-chan!" I exclaimed apologetically, smiling at her and rubbing the back of my neck.

"O-oh it's alright, Kawa-chan!" She replied, bowing slightly and sharing the same sheepish smile I had. "I was just coming to ask you something, anyway." She added, perking my ears.

I tilted my head to one side, looking at her. "What is it? The boys aren't giving you hell, are they?" I asked.

She waved her hands nervously.

"No, nothing like that! I just, umâ€¦" She bowed her head low before me. "Please, allow me to come with you to look for my father. I forgot to ask Hijikata-san, and he's in a meeting with Kondou-san right now, so I didn't wanna intrudeâ€¦" She began to explain.

I nodded. "If it's alright with Souji; his squad is going today, so I don't think he'll mind." I replied, perking her ears.

Chizuru looked up at me and beamed, bowing again. "Thank you so much, Kawa-chan!" She chirped.

>I blinked, smiling softly at her and ruffling her hair. "It's no problem." I shrugged.<p>

"Now what're you two gossiping about?" Souji's voice wondered as he came forward, dressed and ready, left arm resting on the hilt of his katana.

"Chizuru asked if she could come with us to ask about her father in town; I said it wasn't a problem so long as you were alright with it." I explained, meeting his green eyes.

>Souji looked at her and smirked slightly. "Just keep up or I'll kill ya. Got it?" He warned.<p>

She nodded. "Hai! Thank you, Okita-san," she replied lightly.

He smiled lightly, looking to me and smirking again. "Shake a leg, girls," he declared, walking ahead of me to the front gates.

>I rolled my eyes at him and trotted after his longer stride, Chizuru next to me.<p>

.....oOo.....

A loud insult sounded from the bridge.

I scowled in that direction and looked at Souji, sighing. "You deal with them, I'll go with her. Don't get killed," I declared, patting his cheek before trotting after the girl.

The sound of a battle cry rang out as I made it to the shop named Masuya that she'd disappeared into, a yelp of surprise sounding shortly; I drew my katana, bringing it up to block the ronin that struck out at her.

"K-Kawa-chan," she breathed in surprise at seeing me defend her.

I glanced at her, smirking. "You've got a weird taste in trouble, Chizu-chan," I quipped, grunting and knocking the ronin away, the hilt of my katana ramming into his gut as he fell back, spittle flying from his mouth.

I huffed and glared at the four remaining ronin that stood back, hearing a shuffling sound behind me as she got to her feet, short sword drawn. "This should be interesting," I muttered.

Another of the four ronin roared as he flew at me.
>The sound of metal clashing rang out as the ronin's *katana* flew from his grip, a figure in blue blocking my path.

"Souji," I began in surprise.

"O-Okita-san!" Chizuru exclaimed in relief.

He scowled slightly at the shopkeeper. "You seriously don't have good luck; either one of you." He mused. "But then again, that goes for all of us." He added.

I sniffed and pouted at him. "Shut up," I grumbled.

Souji smirked at me as his squad came into arrest the remaining ronin and shopkeeper; I shot him a look, sheathing my katana.
>"You okay?" I asked, looking at the girl as she also sheathed her short sword.<p>

Chizuru nodded, smiling sheepishly. "Thanks for saving me, back there." She replied.

I shrugged. "No problem." I replied lightly.

* * *

><p>AN: _incase anyone is wondering why i just now introduced Chizuru into the foreground, i thought the first few episodes of the canon plot were a little blah so i felt like introducing my OC first before her because let's face it, she's basically an OC insert very well executed into the plot if i might add. lol sorry if that sounded hard, i respect Chizuru up to a certain extent, but the damsel vibe from her kinda drives me nuts.. /
>
>basically speaking, this is one of the tweaks in the plot i'm going to put in this fic. anyway, figured i'd put that out. also, Kisuke looks almost like a cross between the characters

Mugen_ and _**Jin**_ from _**Samurai Champloo**_. there's another tidbit. ;D it's not a crossover so don't kill me for labeling the genre wrong._

on another note, Chizuru's last name roughly translates to '**Uneven Snow**'. _if anyone has a more accurate translation, let me know; i've been curious on what her last name really means, lately. anyway, that's all i'll say for now. enjoy the next chap!_

Sano: **review** Porcelain-chan's fic please; thanks a mil~ ;D

4. Blooming Pt 04: Razing Loyalists

A/N: _where we last left off, Souji and Kawa had taken Chizuru out on a regular patrol and apprehended a possible leak to the Choshuu Clan's whereabouts and plans. what will happen once they've obtained the information; will war break out? or will it be just a wild goose chase? enjoy the chap! ;D_

disclaimer: _i don't own Hakuouki; Kawa belongs to me._

* * *

><p>Chapter Four: Blooming Part 04 - Razing Loyalists are Bad Juju (End of Bloom)**

"This isn't a laughing matter. We could've used the information that Masuya's shop owner is a Choshuu spy to our advantage." Sannan-san chided.

I sweatdropped and smiled patiently at him; even though Sannan-san had sustained an injury while in Osaka with my brother at least a week ago, he was still the Colonel of the Shinsengumi.
>Typical Sannan-san, I thought.

"â€|It was my fault! I rushed into the shop when I heard that someone saw my father there." Chizuru piped up, perking my ears.

"You were Okita-kun and Yasakawa-kun's responsibility." Sannan-san reminded.

"Sannan-san, it was no trouble, reallyâ€|" I began.

"About that; I'm also to blame because I allowed her to go with them." Toshi declared as he entered the meeting room. "Don't drown them in blame." He added as he came forward to sit down with Sannan-san.
>"Nii-san," I declared in surprise.<p>

"Hijikata-san, did you get anything out of Furutaka?" Sano asked him.

He looked at us, the frown on his brow deepening. "They'll set Kyoto aflame on a windy day. In the chaos, they'll kidnap the Emperor and take him to Choshuu." He informed gravely.

"They'll burn down Kyoto!?" Kondou-san balked.

"Set fire to the capital?" I chimed incredulously.

"Can you believe they want to kidnap the Emperor? They act like they respect the Emperor, but I sure don't see it!" Heisuke piped up.

"Those Choshuu freaks must be nuts if they're serious about burnin' down the capital." Shinpachi chimed.

"They're panicking since we apprehended Furutaka. I imagine they'll hold a meeting tonight to come up with some countermeasures." Toshi pointed out to Kondou-san and Sannan-san.

"Where do the Choshuu meet?" Kondou-san wondered.

"Going by their usual pattern, I believe they'll meet at Shikokuya or Ikedaya." Shimada Kai, one of the investigators Toshi had brought on a year ago, declared.

"Right; inform the Aizu Clan about this as well. Toshi, gather up the men." Kondou-san agreed, looking to my brother.
>Toshi nodded slightly.<p>

* * *

><p>He looked at us and smirked slightly. "Surprised you let me come along," he mused.<p>

I shrugged. "You've been busting your ass the past week to prove you're strong enough to be in the squad, so of course you're allowed to come. Besides, Kondou-san needed another blade." I added.

Kisuke smirked again. "Think you'll be able to handle yourself in there?" He asked lightly.

I scoffed and elbowed him. "Don't get too cocky, Kisuke-kun." I remarked.

"Damn it, what the hell's keepin' the Aizu Clan?" Heisuke's voice grumbled near me.

>"They're too late," Shinpachi chimed.<p>

"What should we do: it'd be lame if they escaped, Kondou-san." Souji wondered, looking at him.

He looked at us with a fire in his eyes. "We're out of options; we'll go in on our own!" He stated sternly.

I smiled wryly at him, seeing Souji also smile as Kisuke smirked.

>We took off to the doors of the inn.<p>

"Kawa, stay close, got it?" Souji instructed, his hand squeezing mine.

>I looked at him and nodded, smiling. "Don't get killed, either," I replied with a wink.<p>

The sound of the door being thrown open rang out in the night air as Kondou-san dashed in first.

"We are the Shinsengumi, who serve under the Lord of the Aizu Clan!" He cried loudly.

The rumbling of feet sprinting to the second-floor landing sounded shortly.

"By Imperial decree, everyone is hereby under arrest! We will not hold back on those who resist arrest!"

>The sight of at least twenty or more men stood on the second landing, tense and almost buzzing like a hive of angry bees; I quietly drew my katana.

Several of the ronin drew their swords and charged us.

Talk about biting at the bit, I thought.

"**Kill** **them**!" Kondou-san commanded as we flew forward into the fray.

* * *

><p>-Flashback-

_ 'Kondou-san, may I come along as well? You'll need as many arms as you can get.' I'd requested, bowing my head slightly._

He'd sounded like he'd smiled and nodded. 'You've got a point. All right, you may come along, Yasakawa-kun.' He'd replied.

I'd looked up and smiled lightly. 'Thank you, Kondou-san!' I'd said.

_ 'Neh, Kondou-san, since Kawa-chan's comin' along it'd be easier to have her with us, seein' as yer only taking a few men.' Souji had pointed out next to me._

Kondou-san had chuckled and smiled in reluctant defeat. 'You took the words right out of my mouth, Souji! Besides, it'd be interesting to see what our sword princess has up her sleeve against the Choshuu,' he'd agreed, smiling at me.

I'd blushed humbly and laughed a little.

-**End-o'-Flashback**-

My blade slashed through the heart of another ronin, blocking the next one that flew at me.

Honestly, just how many of these guys are there? I wondered, perking up as a sword stabbed through the back of the ronin that'd attacked, disengaging the blades and stepping aside as he fell face-forward.

"Kondou-san was right in lettin' you come along," Souji mused, smirking at me with his sword held over his shoulder casually.

I rolled my eyes and smirked at him, wiping a smudge of blood from his cheek with my thumb. "You only wanted me to come so you could

show off," I remarked.

He pouted at my accusation, his green eyes hardening as he yanked on my waist and pulled me out of the way as another ronin flew at where I'd stood moments ago, his katana ripping open the throat of the ronin as he felled him.

I nodded slightly, dragging him by the hand to the flight of stairs, slashing at the ronin that got in my way; blood flew as they fell back.

"Passin' through!" Souji barked as we flew past Heisuke once he cleared our path up the stairs.

"Hey, that's cheating!" Heisuke yelped behind us.

"Quit whining and get your ass up here, Heisuke-kun! Otherwise ya won't have anythin' to show up my brother for!" I barked, ramming my katana into the heart of a spare ronin, yanking it free and letting him drop.

We cut down another four or so ronin, moving onto the next room as quietly as possible.

Souji lifted a hand to quiet us as he slid open a door by a crack, looking into the room that had a balcony as we slipped inside as silently as we could.

I poked my head from behind him and widened my eyes slightly at seeing two strange men overlooking the scene in the back of the inn.

Whoever these two were, they seemed like they'd be a handful. I could practically sense it.

>I smirked slightly at the prospect of a challenge, perking up when the taller of the two men looked at us, acknowledging our presence in the room.<p>

Souji lifted his katana a little as indication that we'd come for their heads.

I looked at the blonde man, sizing him up and scowling, gripping the handle of my katana reflexively.

>This oneâ€¦!<p>

.....oOo.....

A grunt escaped him as he fell back.

I glared at the behemoth, clenching my teeth.

Between the redhead behemoth standing before us and the blonde Souji had taken on, I couldn't tell which one was stronger!

>They both seemed to reek of some form of superhuman strength that made me shiver and only want to cut them down.<p>

"You're a monster!" Heisuke spat as he scrambled to his feet, katana clenched tight in hand.

>The man lifted his left hand in surrender. "That's enough; I have no need to fight you." He declared, perking my ears.<p>

Was this guy playing us or something? What the hell did he mean by that?

"There's no need for me to take your life if you pull back now. Both of you." He explained, glancing at me as I stood near Heisuke.

Heisuke smirked. "Sorry, but we've got reason enough to stay. I'm not gonna let a Choshuu bastard like you get away!" He exclaimed as he thrust his katana forward.

"Heisuke, wait!" I barked alertly, widening my eyes when the man caught his blade from descending, gripping the blade tightly.

"I don't appreciate being lumped together with the Choshuu." He stated; he smacked Heisuke's grip from the blade, making him flinch, before he tensed his muscles and slammed a fist into his forehead, sending him flying back into the wall behind me.

"Heisuke!" I exclaimed, rushing to his side as he seemed to grimace from the pain.

The man seemed to disappear through the balcony; I looked over my shoulder to see him gone, looking at Heisuke. "Heisuke, wake up!" I declared, looking at him worriedly.

"K-Kawa-chan, help Souji!" He stammered before his head drooped and he blacked out.

>I looked at him and nodded slightly, straightening before I sprinted out of the room to go find Souji.<p>

God, please don't let anything happen to him!

:::::oOo:::::

The sound of haggard coughing rang in my ears as I slipped into the room; I widened my eyes alertly.

Blood dripped onto the floor from between his fingers that covered his mouth.

>Souji! I looked at the blonde man and clenched my teeth, darting forward to stand between him and my comrade.

"K-Kawa!" He hacked behind me, making me flinch.

I lifted my katana brazenly, glaring at the man as my right arm extended to protect him. "I will kill you if you lay another hand on him!" I vowed coldly, glowering into his garnet eyes.

His garnet eyes looked red in the moonlight; he sneered and lowered his katana to his side. "You will, hm? Why do you protect that pathetic dog behind you when you can barely contain your own pathetic anger?" He remarked.

I growled and flew forward, swinging my katana at his chest; he swerved out of the way, making me skid into the floor.

His own blade lunged at me; I blocked it in time, small sparks flying

when our blades connected, gritting my teeth and glowering up into his red eyes.

>"For a barking Wolf of Mibu, you're actually lovely." He mused lowly, leering a little.<p>

I propelled my knee into his gut, knocking him back as I backed to defend Souji. "Piss off, shithead." I growled, hearing Souji stop his coughing behind me, wheezing now.

"Don't fight him, Kawa! he's too strong!" He growled behind me.

I scoffed. "Doesn't matter; either way, his head's gonna roll for making you bleed. And then some." I remarked softly, gripping the hilt before I flew forward.

The loud sound of blades clashing rang in the air as we danced, our blades clashing and bouncing off each other's as moonlight bounced off the blades.

The blades broke apart for a split second; in that split second, he propelled his foot into my gut, sending me flying back.

>I crashed against the wall, grimacing as I sank down limply.<p>

"I must admit, you're pretty good for a woman pretending to be a warrior. I will commend you for that before your death." He declared as he swung his blade at me.

"**NO**!" I heard Souji yell as he rushed forward.

A metallic '_klang_' rang in the air, surprising Souji, myself, and the stranger.

He panted slightly, glowering at the blonde man, his two swords blocking the man from striking me. "Sorry, but you're not taking her life today!" He shoved him back, sending him into the far wall.

"Kisuke," I breathed as I watched him stand tall before me, '_katana_' and short sword gripped in both hands.

His cobalt gaze glanced at me. "Get up, Kawa." He declared, lunging at the blonde man.

I gingerly got to my feet, grabbing my own '_katana_' and holding it tight as Souji neared me, panting slightly. "Souji," I looked at him, wincing as I looked at the smudges of blood he had on his chin and around his mouth, my stomach lurching as I knew it was his own blood that stained his handsome face.

He smirked wryly at me. "I'm okay, Kawa. It's just a scratch." He mused.

>I scowled slightly, perking up as we both noticed the noise had stopped downstairs, leaving nothing but silence.<p>

Did Toshi get here in time? I wondered, looking up as Kisuke was knocked back by the blonde man.

"Kisuke!" I declared, watching the blonde spare us one glance before he disappeared through the balcony.

>Kisuke glared after his exit, huffing and sheathing his swords,

turning to us. "Are you two alright?" He asked.<p>

I nodded, perking my ears as footsteps sounded rushing upstairs towards our room.

"Kawa!" My brother's familiar voice barked as the door was thrown open to reveal him, Saitou, and Chizuru standing there; a look of relief crossed his face at seeing we were still standing.

Toshi's gaze flew to Souji, to the smudged blood on his face. "Souji," he began.

He huffed and waved him off. "It's nothin', Hijikata-san. It woulda been somethin' though, if Kawa hadn't come and ran that bastard off with his tail between his legs." He explained, his arm on my shoulders squeezing.

I smiled softly at him and nudged Kisuke. "Regardless, we're all alive, and that's important." I declared, looking to my brother.

"Okita-san, your mouthâ€¦ Is that your blood?" Chizuru piped up, slipping past my brother to look at him.

Souji blinked in slight surprise before he seemed to curse under his breath at her keen eye, letting her inspect the smudges. "Damn that bastard." He growled quietly when she pulled away.

I looked at him concernedly, ignoring the stare of my brother.

At least the fight was overâ€¦ for now.

* * *

><p>I grimaced a little as I looked at the medicine Souji downed.<p>

"Just how can that medicine taste good? Most medicine I've heard of that's effective usually tastes awful." Kisuke grumbled at my side.

Toshi glared at him pointedly, an evil aura overcoming his face; Kisuke flinched, hiding behind me.

>I giggled and smirked at his creeped-out face, brushing locks of hair from my eyes.<p>

"So, is this some sort of special prescription?" Chizuru wondered curiously after handing out the small packets of powdered medicine.

"Ishida Sanyaku?" Sano guessed as they downed the medicine. "It's 'special' in its own way." He explained.

"'Ishida Sanyaku'?" She repeated.

"Hijikata-san's family specializes in it." Souji informed with a sideways glance at my brother.

"Yep, that's right; the pain from cuts and bruises fly away once you take some Ishida Sanyaku! Now c'mon, down the hatchet it goes; who

knows if it'll work" Heisuke piped up, downing the medicine; he grimaced when it went down, flinching. "It's nasty" He grumbled.

Toshi glowered at him, the same evil aura overcoming his face as it had earlier with Kisuke, lifting a flaming fist up for emphasis. "***Care to test it out**?" He growled.

Heisuke yelped and lifted his arms in surrender. "Give me a break; it'd be too lame if I got hurt again!" He protested.

I laughed softly, smirking lightly at his demise.
>"Oi, that's not funny, Kawa-chan; just because you got out unscathed don't mean ya gotta laugh at my misery!" Heisuke whined.<p>

"The hell it's not; I'm just glad I don't have to take that damn medicine." I giggled.

"**What was that**?" Toshi growled at me.

I blinked and then tried to match Souji's cat-like smile, waving him off. "Calm down, _Oni Fukuchou_." I urged patiently.

Souji ribbed me gently.
>"Smooth," he muttered from the corner of his mouth; I smirked gently and squeezed his hand.<p>

* * *

><p>"The Aizu Clan has made an official request: they want us to fight against the Choshuu rebels." Kondou-san proclaimed to those of us gathered for the meeting.<p>

A collective exclamation of surprise and pride rang out in the room from the men.

"That's awesome!" Sano declared; Kisuke smirked slightly at him.

"The Aizu Clan has finally recognized our hard work." Kondou-san looked on the verge of weeping for joy.
>I smiled patiently at him.Honestly, Kondou-san, I thought.

"Sweet! The Shinsengumi finally get to take center stage!" Heisuke barked as he pumped a fist into the air.

"What're you talking about? Heisuke, you're staying put since you haven't fully recovered yet." Shinpachi pointed out.
>"No way, that's not cool!" He complained.<p>

"I guess the injured should be good little boys and wait here." Souji mused calmly at my right.

I elbowed him pointedly. "That goes double for you, mister." I declared, perking his ears.

He pouted at me, making me fight a grin. "The hell it does, I'm goin' too" He began to protest.

"Yasakawa-kun's right, that goes for you as well, Okita-kun."
Sannan-san interjected, making both captains look at him. "Sadly, I shall be accompanying you." He mused.

"Nii-san, is it alright that I stay behind as well? I'll man the fort with Souji and Sannan-san," I requested, looking to my brother.

Toshi seemed slightly surprised that I requested such a thing, knowing that I was usually first to be ready to fight the enemy; he smirked slightly and nodded. "You may. Ichinose, since Yasakawa is staying behind, you're to go in her stead." He obliged, looking to Kisuke who perked up at being required to go with everyone.

Kisuke nodded slightly. "Sir," he replied, glancing at me; I shrugged innocently.

Souji elbowed me gently. "Oi, I don't need a babysitter," he grumbled.

I elbowed back and smiled. "Shut up and just swallow your pride, idiot." I chided.
>He pouted, making me giggle quietly, before he smirked softly and squeezed my hand out of reflex.<p>

"Yukimura-kun, would you mind going as well?" Kondou-san asked, perking my ears as Souji, Heisuke and I looked at the girl.

"Chizuru!?" Heisuke balked.

"Kondou-san," I began in surprise.
>Chizuru did have some skill with a blade, but "some skill" would be meaningless if a Choshuu cut her down in combat.<p>

"I won't be sending you to the battlefield, but I could use your help delivering messages and tending to the wounded." Kondou-san explained as I made to open my mouth to protest; I closed my mouth and sighed, crossing my arms over my chest.

"We won't force you to go, you made decide whether to go or stay." Toshi chimed, looking at her.

She looked at them and then to us before nodding. "I'll go if you think I can be of help." She declared.

I smirked softly at her, huffing. "If that's the case, ya'd better come back in one piece or a _**certain someone**_ is gonna get it when you lot come back." I vowed lightly, throwing Toshi a look before smiling at her.

Chizuru chuckled nervously. "Right," she said.

"Chizuru, you'd better work hard for us too!" Heisuke piped up, lifting his fist.
>"I'll do my best!" She nodded, mirroring his lifted fist.<p>

"You're not going just to play around, so don't get in everyone's way." Sannan-san pointed out sharply.

She nodded. "Right!" She declared.

"All right, let's hit 'em with everything we've got!" Shinpachi declared as he hopped to his feet in excitement, the rest of the men also jumping to their feet in the same excitement.

I chuckled and smiled at them.

:::::::::oOo:::::::::

- **Flashback** -

He'd smirked at me. 'Sure you don't wanna go?' He'd wondered.

I'd glanced over at Souji and shook my head, crossing my arms at my chest. 'Pretty sure.' I'd smiled at him, punching his arm affectionately. 'Kick some ass for me out there, 'kay?' I'd replied.

Kisuke had smiled slightly and rubbed his arm absently, nodding. 'You got it. Don't get too rowdy either, sword princess.' He'd remarked before turning to follow the others.

I'd huffed and shot him a scowl, kicking him in the ass with a foot. 'Shut up and don't get killed out there, idiot!' I'd barked.

He'd laughed lightly, waving calmly at me with his back turned as he went on his way.

-**End-o'-Flashback**-

He groaned. "Man, I wanna go; babysitting headquarters is so boring!" He griped, arms behind his head as he stood against the doorway. >I rolled my eyes patiently and smirked. Still the spitfire, no matter what ya do, I thought.

"At least you can return to the frontline once your wounds heal. I, on the other handâ€¦|" Sannan-san mused, rubbing his bum arm gingerly.

Souji and I looked at him; he huffed and elbowed Heisuke's ribs. "Well I guess we should be good boys and rest up. C'mon, princess," he sighed, turning to head back inside the depths of the compound, dragging me by the hand.

"What'd you do **that** for, Souji!?" Heisuke barked indignantly behind us.

I laughed softly and smirked over my shoulder at the angered teenager before looking at him. "You're horrible sometimes, y'know that?" I scolded him with a shake of my head. >Souji smirked at me, slinging his arm to hold my waist and pulling me to his hip. "Quit complainin', ya still love me for it." He teased with a wink.<p>

I blushed slightly and pouted, exhaling. "Shut up and get into bed, otherwise you're not gonna heal up." I declared.

He huffed and squeezed my waist. "Mm nope, don't feel like sleepin'."

He said with an exhale.

I scowled knowingly up at him. "Souji!" I began annoyedly.
>He looked at me with one open green eye. "Yes?"<p>

I sighed and ran a hand through my hair. "You're an idiot." I muttered, deciding that even if I forced him to get some rest, he'd still be stronger than me.

Souji smirked and snickered, squeezing my waist affectionately.

* * *

><p>AN: _and so starts the Kinmon no Hen incident. it's kind of ironic how first the war begins with the Ikedaya Incident and then it rolls into the Kinmon no Hen. ironic and weird, if you ask me. either way, it just means that the Shinsengumi will gain more credibility by the Aizu to me._
>anyway, more coming soon so look forward to that!

Heisuke: yo, **review** Porcelain-chan's fic; it's totally kickass! xD

5. Wilting Banner in the Sky

A/N: _all the trouble stirred up by the Choshuu in the past two events (the Ikedaya and Kinmon no Hen Incident) has led to the need for more recruits. will the gang be able to handle more recruits living under the same roof? and will someone be forced to die? enjoy the chap!_

disclaimer:_ i don't own Hakouki; Kawa and Kisuke belong to me._

* * *

><p>Chapter Five: Wilting Banner in the Sky**

"Itou-_dono_, we've been waiting for you!" Kondou-san's voice sounded excited.

I trotted over to the doorway where Souji, Sano, Shinpachi and Saitou were standing at, gently pushing past the four to poke my head beyond Saitou's shoulder to see what had gotten our commander so excited.

A very feminine-looking man with long black hair wearing lilac garb was speaking to Kondou-san, smiling as he talked animatedly like if they were old friends reunited.

I snorted, ducking my head back to stand beside Souji. "Who's Mr. Fancy?" I asked around a giggle.

This guy looked to be more girly than I ever aspired to be!

"Itou Kashitarou. He's the head of Itou Dojo in Edo." Saitou informed calmly, smirking a little at my amusement.
>"The name doesn't ring a bell." I mused, crossing my arms at my

chest.<p>

"He uses the Itou-Ryuun style swordsmanship." Shinpachi added, sending a scowl over at the effeminate man.

I raised a brow curiously. "Doesn't look like he picks up his sword very often. I'll admit one thing, though: if I had one, he could borrow my kimono anytime he wanted." I joked.

Souji, Shinpachi and Sano snickered while Saitou simply smirked amusedly; Souji clapped a hand on my back and sighed. "Ya'd hafta hold him down to make him look like a proper geisha." He mused with a smirk.

>I laughed softly.<p>

Saitou scowled over at him. "I heard he believes in 'Revere the Emperor, Expel the Foreigners'; it's surprising he decided to join the Shinsengumi." He said thoughtfully, perking my ears.

"He believes the same thing those Choshuu dogs believe?" I wondered in surprise.

"I wonder if we'll get along okayâ€|" Sano mused more to himself.

"Itou-san is highly educated and a skilled orator." Sannan-san declared behind us, making the five of us look to see he'd eavesdropped.

>Sano looked thoughtful. "Sannan-san, are you two friendsâ€|?" He began to ask before noticing he'd left.<p>

I frowned softly at where he'd stood moments ago.

>"Sannan-san's been really distant lately." Shinpachi muttered.<p>

Sano frowned as well. "Yeah, he hardly ever talks with us anymore; of course, he was never much of a talker to begin with." He chimed.

"You think it's because of his bum arm?" I wondered aloud.

"Dunno, but it's obviously somethin'." Shinpachi shrugged.

:::::::::oOo:::::::::

I ran the cloth along the length of the _katana_'s blade, admiring it in the amber light of my lantern.

A knock sounded on the door. "You awake?" His familiar voice asked.

I blinked and nodded. "Yeah," I replied, watching the door slide open before he slipped inside my room, closing the door behind his entrance and sauntering over to sit with me. "Is something wrong?" I asked, lowering the _katana_ and looking at him, curious and a little concerned as to why he'd decided to come visit me this late at night.

He placed his _katana_ next to him on the floor, green eyes slightly

stoic. "You saw Itou-san, right?" He asked.

I nodded, brushing locks of black hair from my cheek. "Yeah, earlier. He doesn't look as intimidating as you guys made him out to be." I mused.

"Try to stay away from him as best you can." He instructed, perking my ears.

I tilted my head to one side, brow furrowing. "Why; what'd he do?" I asked quietly.

His green eyes turned stoic, reminiscent of how they once looked a few years ago.

"He tried to come onto Chizuru-chan, in the courtyard; only because she looked pretty." His brow furrowed, dark brows tightening. "If he tried to make a move on her, then he'll try and do the same to you, if not anything worse than what he just pulled." He advised in a low tone.

I quieted and looked down to see the katana in my lap was held tight by my left hand; I eased my grip on the hilt, nodding. "Okay. Souji, do you like him being here?" I wondered, looking up and locking gaze with his green orbs.

He scoffed and scowled again, lowering his gaze to the light that caught on the blade of my drawn katana. "Hell no. If he comes onto you, he's as good as dead when my sword rips out his throat." He declared, his gaze lifting to meet mine.

A shiver rolled down my spine at seeing him look so determined and serious, a side to him I hardly ever saw since I'd met him when Toshi took me in a few years ago; I nodded again, smiling wryly. "Someone's being overprotective." I mused.

Souji blinked before his green eyes glittered playfully at my tone; he relaxed his sitting position, leaning back a little and using his arms to support his weight. "Well what the hell didja expect? Gotta protect the woman I love, right?" He shrugged with a nonchalant smile.

My cheeks warmed and I smiled softly, sheathing the katana. "Yeah. Y'can be a little overbearing sometimes, but it's sweet of you to want to protect me even when y'know that I'm fully capable of kicking ass." I admitted lightly.

A pout crossed his face, making me giggle; the pout disappeared and was replaced with his trademark cat smile as he leaned forward to reach and stroke my cheek gently. "It's rare to ever hear ya complain, princess," he mused.

I smiled again, holding his hand to my cheek. "Shut up," I grumbled.

Souji chuckled and leaned closer to incline his head and kiss me slowly.

>I blushed a little before smiling, gently pulling him forward and kissing back.<p>

He smiled against my lips, pulling me forward into his lap as his arms found my hips.

It was sweet of him to want to protect me, I'd admit that. But if he was serious about making me stay away from Itou-san, then I would listen and do my best to keep away from him.

God only knew if I'd underestimated him.

* * *

><p>"I feel sorry for Sannan-san. Even the soldiers are avoiding him, now." Sano mused aloud.<p>

"They're avoiding him?" Chizuru repeated confusedly.

"He treats everyone nasty like that; the men avoid him because they're so scared of 'im." Shinpachi explained.

I frowned at that, folding my arms in the sleeves of my gray _haori_. "If it's because of that bastard Itou-san, I swear," I began.

Souji rolled his eyes and poked my cheek. "Calm down, will ya? Besides, if he goes anywhere near ya it'll be my blade stabbin' his heart out." He pointed out.

I blinked and then smiled at him, sighing in defeat. "Fine," I grumbled.

"I can't stand that jerk Itou; that sly tongue of his pisses me off." Sano declared, stirring our attention to the main conversation.

>"It's like he's actin' all high-and-mighty as he looks down on others." Shinpachi chimed darkly.<p>

"I don't like him either, but I'll admit he's pretty good with a sword." Souji mused. "If he goes anywhere near Kawa though, he's dead." He added grimly.

I blushed slightly and looked down humbly. "I can handle myself," I grumbled.

"Souji's got a point, I'll admit; if he does lay a hand on either you or Chizuru, that's grounds enough to run him through." Saitou commented, perking my ears.

I smiled wryly at him, brushing strands of hair from my face. "How sweet of ya, Saitou-kun," I teased lightly. >He smirked slightly at me.<p>

"Oi, how many times have I told ya not to flirt with my girl, Hajime-kun?" Souji chided playfully.

I backhanded him chidingly, making him flinch and rub his head gingerly, crossing my arms in the sleeves of my _haori_ again. "Give it a rest, Casanova." I advised patiently.

Souji pouted sorely at me, earning a quiet laugh from Chizuru; I smiled calmly, knowing in the back of my mind that he was going to repay me for that sometime in the future (knowing his chivalrous

mindset, he was prolly gonna best me in a sparring session or something like that).

"I don't trust him." Toshi mused aloud, referring to Itou-san.

>"Then go send him away, Hijikata-san; tell him the Shinsengumi don't need rubbish like 'im." Souji offered with a nonchalant shrug.<p>

"There's no way Kondou-san would approve; he absolutely adores Itou-san." Toshi quipped.

>"Jeez, you're useless; it's your job as the Oni Vice-Commander to make the impossible happen." He argued.<p>

He huffed. "Then ****you**** can be the new Vice-Commander, Souji." He retorted.

He laughed at the idea. "I'll pass, it'd be too annoying." He remarked lightly.

>I smiled slightly, rolling my eyes.<p>

"Saitou-san, do you dislike Itou-san as well?" Chizuru asked, looking at the blue-eyed captain.

He glanced at her before looking away. "A group grows and expands when people with various ideas get together. But it'll fall apart from the inside out if you force diversification." He mused.

>I frowned at the idea, resting my cheek against Souji's shoulder.<p>

If diversification was what Kondou-san was doing by having Itou-san and his ronin join up with the Shinsengumi, then we were in for more trouble.

Just because Itou-san was educated and supposedly good with a blade, that didn't mean any of the other men in our ranks were any less better; he was just one man.

Did Kondou-san see him as a god or something?

* * *

><p>The brief chill of cold night air stole into the room.
I stirred a little, listening as the shuffling of footsteps sounded from outside of the room before they quickly faded down the porch.

Chizuru.

I sat up alertly, looking to her side of the room to see her bed was empty.

"Shit." I muttered, throwing the blankets off and scrambling to my feet, throwing open my closet to pull out my gray _haori_, shrugging my arms through the sleeves.

I grabbed my _katana_ and slipped it beneath the sash of the baby blue sleeping gown, opening the door and slipping out to go to get Souji.

Something was up tonight, and I had a bad feeling about it.
>I knocked on the door.<p>

A shuffling sounded on the other side of the door before a grumbled curse was uttered. "Now what?" His sleepy voice asked on the other end.

"Souji, it's me." I answered quietly, seeming to perk his ears, before I slid the door open to poke my head inside his room.

His sleeping yukata was opened to almost reveal his lightly toned torso, his russet brown hair that fell down his shoulders slightly disheveled from sleep; he rubbed sand from his eye gingerly, looking up at me with one open green eye. "What's wrong; did something happen?" He wondered.

I nodded, slipping inside his room. "Something's up, Chizuru's gone." I replied, perking his ears.

He blinked back sleep and looked up at me. "Did you see where she went?" He asked, his tone rather sharp; I shook my head, perking up as he got to his feet and started to get dressed.

"Souji," I began as he threw his kosode on, tying it and shrugging his haori over his shoulders after fixing his hakama.

"C'mon, we'd better find her before the oni gets wind of this." He declared, slipping his katana and short sword into the sash at his waist before sliding the door open, taking my hand and leading me after him down the porch.

I scowled slightly into the dark courtyard, hoping she wasn't in any kind of trouble.

:~::~oOo::~~::

We made it to the other side of the compound without being stopped.

>The night was eerily silent.<p>

He exhaled a little, looking at me as we paused short of entering a hallway. "Maybe she just got up to get some water, Kawa. She's prolly back in bed by now." He reasoned.

I lifted a hand to rub my neck absently. "Yeah, I suppose you're right. Maybe I was just being paranoid after allâ€|" I began.

"**Somebody; anybody**! **HELP ME**!" Her familiar voice cried from down the hall, jerking our attention away.

"Chizuru," I began, gripping the hilt of my katana before Souji and I sprinted down the hall towards the room her voice was coming from.

>"Kawa," Toshi's voice sounded behind me as we neared the room.<p>

I looked to see him, Saitou, Sano, and Shinpachi running after us; I nodded, throwing open the door to the room to see Chizuru was there with a Fury-transformed Sannan-san, his hand gripping the hilt of her short sword.

"Sannan-san!" Toshi moved forward to sharply smack his hand away from the sword, standing between him and the girl as Souji and Saitou moved past him to hold Sannan-san back by his arms on the other side of the room.

Chizuru wavered and would've fallen forward if Toshi hadn't caught her in time, setting her on the floor and looking at her concernedly.

>Sannan-san snarled loudly in pain.<p>

"Sannan-san," I began as I gripped the hilt of my _katana_.

"Kawa, take her." Toshi ordered, letting me move forward to gather the girl in my arms as he straightened and assessed the situation as Sannan-san doubled over in the pain that seemed to radiate through his body. "Shinpachi, take the Maekawa-tei Entrance; Harada, you take the Yagi-tei Entrance. Keep an eye on our men, don't let anyone near this room!" He ordered.

"Got it," Sano nodded as he and Shinpachi did as told.

"Saitou, stay on standby in the courtyard. Keep an eye out for members of Itou's faction." Toshi added to Saitou.

>He nodded and hurried out of the room to take his position.<p>

"Hijikata-san, I'd like to stay here." Souji offered as he looked at the pain-ridden Sannan-san.

"Souji," I began in surprise.

He glanced up at me and winked. "Go back to bed, Kawa; ya've done all you could." He instructed.

>I quieted and nodded, looking down at the girl. "Right."<p>

"Fine; tonight will be the turning point one way or another. Will he live, die or break?" Toshi stated rather gravely.

>I looked up at him and then at the weary Fury. "Nii-san," I began softly.<p>

What would happen to Sannan-san after this passed: would he die after all? Or would he go mad like the Furies we've seen in the past?

* * *

><p>AN: _okay, i know Souji wasn't the first one to find Chizuru and Sannan-san in the episode. actually, i don't think it's known who heard them first, to be honest; maybe everyone heard? idk. anyway, more coming soon so enjoy yeah? and incase anyone noticed, i'm not treating this fic like i did to my previous canon-plot fic '_**Ameyuri**_' where i tried to go by what happened in episode after episode. other than that, expect to see more soon! (':_

Kawa: Porcelain-chan requests that you **review** please; thanks~! : 'D

A/N: _where we last left off, Sannan-san had drank the _Ochimizu_ and turned into a Fury, almost killing Chizuru in the process of his madness. what happened to him? and how will things turn out the next morning..? enjoy the chap!_

****disclaimer****: _i don't own Hakuouki; Kawa and Kisuke belong to me.

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* * *

><p>Chapter Six: Ocean Heaves - I See the Shore

A slight yawn escaped as I rubbed sand from my eye.

"I would imagine you didn't sleep very well after last night," Saitou mused quietly at my left side as Chizuru placed the cups of tea before us.

I shrugged and ran a hand through my hair I'd kept down since last night, sipping the tea. "Thank you. And yeah, not much; but then again, I doubt anyone else here got much sleep either." I replied in the same tone, taking a second sip from the warm drink.

The back door of the meeting room opened as Souji and Inoue-san appeared, stirring my attention alertly as I looked to see them returned safely.

"The crisis's been averted." Souji announced, entering first into the room with Inoue-san following him as he sat down at the corner of the room behind everyone else.

My shoulders sagged in relief as I straightened to go sit with him, handing him his cup of tea.

"He's sleeping now; he's so quiet and still." Inoue-san chimed as he sat down near Kondou-san's right.

"So Sannan-san succeeded?" Shinpachi asked hopefully, asking the question the rest of us were wondering on.

"We won't know for sure until he wakes up. He doesn't look any different from yesterday, but stillâ€¦" Inoue-san explained.

The front door of the meeting room opened then, revealing Itou-san's face as he appeared before us. "Good morning." He said lightly.

We all tensed slightly at his appearance.

Shit, I'd forgotten about him! Now what were we gonna doâ€¦|?

Souji coughed suddenly, covering his mouth.

"Souji," I began concernedly.

"Are you okay, Souji?" Sano asked him.

He nodded, removing his hand from his mouth. "Yeah, just reacting to the gust of stale air." He replied with a wry smirk.

>I frowned softly, handing him his tea which he took a decent sip from, seeing him take my hand afterward and squeeze reflexively, a

softness glittering in his green eyes at our clasped hands.<p>

"Would that disturbance last night have something to do with why everyone looks deathly pale despite how beautiful it is outside?" Itou-san asked of Kondou-san and Toshi, glancing at those of us gathered in the room.

"Oh, um well..." Kondou-san hesitated to answer, looking away as he seemed to try and think of a reasonable alibi.

Shinpachi and Sano shared a look. "Oi, Sano, make up an excuse!" Shinpachi hissed.

"Who me?" Sano balked.

"C'mon, let's leave this to the _expert_ at explanations." Souji said quietly to both captains as he, Shinpachi, Sano and I looked to the aforementioned third squad captain.

I sipped my tea absently as Souji retreated to sit back down at my side. _This should be interesting_, I thought. Not only was Saitou wise for his age, he was the best around when it came to delivering a solid explanation... Or in this instance, a damn good alibi.

Saitou straightened to address Itou-san. "Military Advisor Itou, there was indeed an accident here last night at our headquarters. There are aspects of the situation that have yet to be clarified." He explained calmly, as cool as a cucumber like always.

"How troublesome!" Itou-san gasped; I rolled my eyes at his overtly-dramatic tone, sipping my tea.

"Yes it is; we do not wish to trouble you with this as of yet. I shall report on the situation later this evening if you like." Saitou offered in the same calm tone.

"Very well; I understand your position. I look forward to hearing about it in detail this evening." Itou-san mused lightly, looking at Kondou-san again before he exited the meeting room and left.

A collective sigh of relief sounded in the room as soon as his footsteps faded.

"It feels like he let it slide; think he liked how Saitou-kun handled the situation?" Souji wondered.

>"I hope that's the case," Saitou mused.<p>

Toshi looked serious (as per usual, knowing my brother). "All of our high-ranking officers are here except for Sannan-san. It won't take Itou long to figure out that something must've happened to him." He pointed out.

Souji exhaled and lifted a hand to rub the back of his neck. "You're right; man that guy's such a pain." He griped.

"What should we do, Toshi?" Kondou-san asked, looking to my brother.

I looked at him and lowered my gaze to the _katana_ gathered against

my right shoulder.

>Moving to Nishi Hongan-ji was a reality now, moreso than a possibility, if we were to hide this new issue from Itou-san's sniffing nose.<p>

* * *

><p>My right foot swung in the air into the jaw of an invisible enemy.<p>

I straightened slightly, twisting on my left heel and swinging the _katana_ in a half-circle, pretending to slice open the gut of an enemy.

I panted slightly, straightening and sheathing my _katana_ wordlessly, looking up at the flying cherry blossoms that dropped softly after fluttering around me.

"Never figured the sight of you with cherry blossoms would be _this_ nice." A voice said behind me, perking my ears.

I turned to see his familiar cobalt blue eyes; he smiled slightly, removing the straw hat from his head and tucking it under his arm. "Good to see you're back." I replied, truly glad that he'd returned safely from his trip to Edo with Heisuke.

Kisuke nodded and extended a hand to help me onto the porch, the smile on his face. "Feels like forever since I've been around. How's everyone doing?" He wondered.

I shrugged. "The same." I answered calmly, walking down the porch with him at my right side.

He huffed. "That doesn't surprise me; how's Okita-san?" He asked, his voice quieting as he seemed to recall the night at Ikedaya.

>I smiled thoughtfully. "He's the same as ever. Though Itou-san has him kind of on edge." I admitted.<p>

Kisuke lifted a dark brow. "What'd he do, try and make a pass at him?" He guessed, smirking at the joke.

I snorted and then laughed. "Not even! Souji woulda already killed him by now if that were so." I declared, explaining to him why Souji was being protective lately.

He scoffed and looked at the straw hat under his arm, a frown crossing his brow. "That slithering bastard. It's a wonder your brother hasn't mentioned anything." He mused.

I shrugged again, brushing a few strands of hair from my face. "Tell me about it; none of the others trust him, either. Especially my brother." I chimed quietly.

Kisuke glanced at me out of the corner of my eye.

>I looked at him, seeing him blink; I scowled slightly. "What?" I wondered, curious if I had something on my face.<p>

"Nothing. It's just, it seems like you really care about what happens to your brother, even if he's only related through your father's side." He admitted, lowering his gaze.

I felt my cheeks warm slightly; I quieted and smiled softly, closing my eyes as I punched him.

"Ow, what the hell, Kawa?" Kisuke yelped, stepping away by an inch and rubbing his arm gingerly, looking at me with sore cobalt eyes.

I chuckled and smirked up at him with one open gray eye. "Idiot, it's not just him! I care about what happens to all the people I care about. ****Especially**** moreso if they're like my brothers." I declared patiently.

He made a face similar to a pout, continuing to rub his arm. "Whatever you say. Geez, I forgot just how good of a right hook you are. That hurt," he grumbled aloud.

I laughed quietly and smirked again. "Quit being such a baby; I'd have figured goin' on a field trip to Edo with Heisuke was enough to man you up." I mused.

Kisuke snorted and looked away curtly, his cheeks a rosy pink. "S-shut up, Kawa," he grumbled.
>I giggled.<p>

"Geez, I just sneezed like twice! What tha hell've ya two been saying about me?" Souji's voice sounded from the front gates.

I blinked to see him, Heisuke, Chizuru, and their two combined squads ready to depart; my cheeks warmed as I mentally kicked myself, almost forgetting about going on patrol with Souji and Heisuke today.

"That info, Okita-san, is classified," Kisuke answered matter-of-factly, smirking.

Souji sniffed, his eye twitching in slight annoyance. "I wasn't ****askin'**** you, Ichinose-kun. Kawa, c'mon, we'd better get going." He declared cattily, tossing me my haori and headband.

I caught both expertly, pulling the headband on before shrugging through the sleeves of my uniform coat. "Right." I looked back at Kisuke and smiled lightly. "See you later, Kisuke-kun," I declared, trotting forward to walk next to Chizuru and Souji as we set out.

He crossed his arms in the sleeves of his haori as we were coming up on the main street. "He's getting bold if he's willin' to talk smack to me." He thought aloud at my side.

I smirked gently and hooked my arm through his elbow. "It's about time he grows a pair." I chimed before looking at him. "That doesn't worry you, does it?" I wondered.

Souji opened a green eye at my question before he snorted derisively. "Why should it worry me? If it ever came down to it, ya know I'd win in a duel with him." He remarked.

I rolled my eyes at his boast, blowing strands of hair from the side of my face as he and Heisuke split up the routes, Heisuke's group with Chizuru and Heisuke at the back walking away down the main street as we went down a different street. "I'm well aware of that. It's just, I know you two well enough to know that you're both

stubborn as hell." I said quietly.

He smirked softly, removing his arm from the left sleeve of his haori to fold on my shoulders. "That makes three of us, then, Miss Spitfire." He mused in the same tone.

My cheeks warmed before I smiled fondly, lifting a hand to squeeze the one that held my left shoulder. "Shut up," I grumbled.
>Souji chuckled softly.<p>

:::::::::oOo:::::::::

"How's it look over that way?" Heisuke wondered as Souji and I walked with him and Chizuru as our squads joined up again.

"Same as usual; looked like it to me, anyway. What d'ya think Kawa-chan, anything strange or off?" Souji shrugged, looking at me.

>I shook my head. "Nothing yet," I offered.<p>

"But I bet things will pick up with the Shogun's procession to the capital." He admitted, perking my ears; I glanced up at him.

The Shogunate was going to pass through Kyoto? That was a surprise.

"'Procession'; doesn't that mean the Shogun will visit Kyoto?" Chizuru asked aloud, mirroring my surprise.
>He nodded. "Yep; that's what has Kondou-san so worked up." He replied, looking at her.<p>

I smiled slightly, crossing my arms in the sleeves of my haori.
"_That_ doesn't surprise me; y'know how Kondou-san gets whenever he hears wind that the Shogun would be in the area." I mused lightly.

"Yeah, I bet he is," Heisuke mused more to himself.

Chizuru looked at him with slight concern; I lifted a brow before exhaling quietly.
>Souji's haggard coughing sounded behind us, perking my ears alertly as I looked to see he had kneeled a little, covering his mouth as he coughed.<p>

"Souji," I trotted to his side, placing an arm around his shoulders as I looked at him worriedly, Chizuru following me quickly.
>"Are you alright?" She asked alertly.<p>

He nodded, his green eyes glancing over to the side; I followed his line of sight and frowned to see two ronin had cornered a brown-haired girl in a pink kosode.

"Honestly," I muttered, helping him stand up; my hand lowered to the hilt of my katana as I stepped away from his side to address the impending situation.

Why did Souji have to be so damn chivalrous sometimes?
Seriously...

"Oi, we're warriors fightin' every day to expel them damn

foreigners." One of the two ronin said proudly. "Of course yer gonna offer us a cup or two of booze, or maybe even yourself!" He added.

My nose wrinkled at his tone.

"Stop it, unhand me!" The girl cried as the second ronin grabbed her wrist, Souji, Heisuke, Chizuru and I moving forward.

"Oi, that's definitely no way to treat a woman! You two should go back to the shithole you crawled out from and learn some manners." I declared loudly, jerking their attention away from the girl to us.

My hand on the hilt unsheathed the blade a little as I smirked, ignoring Souji's scowl boring into my skull. "I'd highly recommend it." I mused.

"Bitch, mind yer own damn business!" The ronin closest to us snapped before he eyed me up and down; he huffed and then smirked. "Of course that depends if yer into the 'servin' business." He mused, peeling away from the girl to walk towards me.

I glared at him, exhaling before I slammed my right fist into his jaw in an uppercut, making him swear loud; the hilt of my katana rammed into his gut as he jerked his head down and tried to get at me, making him swear again before slumping down, blacking out.

Too easy.

"Damn whore," the second ronin lunged at me when he thought I wasn't looking.

Souji caught him, a stony look in his eyes before he smirked wryly. "Now, now, that's really no way to treat a lady," his hilt stabbed into the man's gut; he grimaced, groaning and falling onto the ground. "***Especially** the woman I love." He added under his breath, slipping the katana back into his sash.

The girl fixed her hair a little and came forward, bowing respectfully. "Thank you very much; my name is Nagumo Kaoru." She declared in rather heavy accent, smiling at us.

I blinked as I noticed that she looked eerily similar to Chizuru. "It wasn't much. Those guys were total jackasses anyway, tryin' to pick up a girl in broad daylightâ€|" I shrugged, perking up as Souji pulled Chizuru forward to place her next to the girl. "Um, what're you doingâ€|?" I asked in confusion.

"Thought as such; you're practically identical. Neh, Kawa-chan?" Souji mused, looking at me.

I looked at the two of them and nodded. "Yeah, you've got a point. It's kind of creepy, to be honest," I mused.

"Y'sure? I don't think they resemble each otherâ€|" Heisuke wondered in confusion.

I rolled my eyes and cuffed him gently. "That's because yer too young to see the similarity," I said with a sigh.

>"Oi, Kawa-chan, that's not funny! I'm not that young anyway; I'm only a few years younger than you!" He barked indignantly.<p>

I laughed quietly and smirked. "Whatever you say, Heisuke," I sighed again.

"You'd be the spitting image of her if you dressed up like a girl." Souji pointed out calmly, earning a look from me.

I crossed my arms in the sleeves of my _haori_, pouting.
>This Nagumo girl didn't look to be much older than Chizuru; it'd be really creepy if they were the same age!<p>

The girl moved forward to better address him. "I wish to properly thank you, but I have an errand I must attend to."
>She bowed slightly before straightening. "Please forgive my brash behavior." She declared, walking away down the street before pausing and looking at him. "We shall meet again, Okita Souji-san of the Shinsengumi." She added with a smile, turning to walk away.<p>

Heisuke snickered. "Hey, I think she's got the hots for you, Souji." He mused lightly.

"You'll never beat Sano if you seriously think that." Souji quipped.

THWACK.

THWACK.

"**OW**!" Both Souji and Heisuke yelped in chorus as a bump appeared on their heads.

"And if she ever comes near you like that ****again****, she's dead meat." I declared cattily, cracking my knuckles.

"G-geez, Kawa-chan that hurt! Besides, I didn't do anything!" Heisuke complained.

THWACK.

"Mentioning that some _tramp_ has the hots for Souji is ****doing** something****, Heisuke." I stated, dusting my hands off as he now sported two swollen bumps on his head that made him look like a panda.

Souji snickered next to me. "I've never seen ya this jealous, Kawa-chan," he mused slyly.

My fist sailed into his nose, making him stagger back. "Don't let your ego get any bigger, dummy." I remarked coolly, crossing my arms in the sleeves of my _haori_ as we started walking away.

He seemed to recover rather quick, sidling up to my side out of loyalty and slinging his arm around my hips. "Honestly, she's not half the gorgeous woman you are, Kawa," he mused.

I felt my cheeks warm and I spluttered a huff, looking away. "Kissing ass isn't gonna lighten things, Souji." I remarked cattily.

Souji pouted, looking away and sighing. "I guess I'll just hafta lighten things later." He said thoughtfully, hinting at what I had figured he was going to hint at some time soon.

I blushed again and elbowed him. "Oi, not in public, there're virgin ears listenin' in." I scolded in a hiss, referring to both Chizuru and Heisuke walking behind us.

He snickered and squeezed my hips affectionately. "Yes, ma'am," he amended obediently, his cat-like smile flashing at me as his green eyes glittered.

>I huffed and blushed more.<p>

He was still a letch, even if I did love him.

* * *

><p>"I believe everyone has heard that Tokugawa Iemochi, the 14th Shogun of the Tokugawa Shogunate, will officially visit Kyoto. The Shinsengumi have been asked to guard him as he passes through the city on his way to Nijou Castle." Kondou-san announced proudly.<p>

A wave of excited chatter consumed the men, the excitement almost tangible.

Toshi scoffed under his breath. "After the incidents at Ikedaya and Kinmon no Hen, the big-wigs have finally had to acknowledge our hard work." He mused aloud, sharing in the same pride Kondou-san had.

"The fate of the country resides in our swords while he's in our careâ€| or something like that," Souji commented at my left as I sat between him and Shinpachi.

"Right," Shinpachi smiled lightly as Saitou and I smirked.

"Guards during a processionâ€| If only Sannan-san were still with us; we've truly lost a very valuable ally." Itou-san sighed wearily.

I shot him a look as Kondou-san and Toshi glanced at him before Kondou-san cleared his throat.

>"At any rate, things are going to get crazy; first, we need to set up our units." Kondou-san stated, addressing the room at large again, seeming to brush off Itou-san's comment as best he could. "Let's seeâ€| Toshi, Souji, and Iâ€|" he began.<p>

"Sorry, Kondou-san, but could we have Souji sit this one out?" Toshi requested, perking my ears as well as Souji's. "I think he's catching a cold." He explained.

"Toshi," I began in confusion, looking at the aforementioned brunette.

"Is that true, Souji; are you okay?" Kondou-san wondered, looking at him.

"I don't think it's a problem; Hijikata-san's over-reacting." Souji said with a huff.

>"It's not something you can blow off. You were just coughing a

second ago." Toshi argued calmly.<p>

"Jeez, you're so over-protective." Souji remarked.

Heisuke raised his hand, stirring my attention away from the two.

"What is it, Heisuke?" Kondou-san asked.

>"Kondou-san, I'm not feelin' that great eitherâ€|" He replied, slightly surprising him.<p>

"What; don't tell me you caught a cold too?" Kondou-san wondered.

"It's our time to shine, so I was going to have everyone greet the Shogun," he reasoned.

"If it's alright with you, Kondou-san, I'll stay behind as well. I think I pulled something earlier during our patrols, so I'll stay with Souji and Heisuke." I piped up calmly, irking him.

"Yasakawa-kun, are you sure? This isn't like you..." he began.

I smiled lightly and waved it off. "Yeah, positive! I don't mind, besides, you guys are the real reason the Shogun has come to the capital, not me." I assured him, feeling like I was trying to reason with a worried father.

Kondou-san quieted before sighing. "Very well, you're permitted to stay." He mused in reluctant defeat.

>I bowed my head slightly, nodding. "Thank you, Kondou-san," I replied.<p>

Souji smirked at me. "Yer bein' really endearing lately, love," he mused lightly.

I blushed slightly and huffed, elbowing him. "Shut up." I grumbled.

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He coughed again for the fifth time within the hour.

I frowned as I entered the room from the back hall with tea, sliding the door closed as I entered and shuffled to sit with him.

>"It's nothing to worry about, hm?" I wondered, handing him his cup.<p>

Souji made a face from above his cup, sipping the hot drink. "Don't patronize me," he grumbled.

I returned the expression and leaned forward to press my hand to his forehead, frowning again. "You feel a little warm," I muttered.

>He caught my arm gently, making me look at him; he huffed wryly.

"That's only because I've got a hot nurse like you lookin' after me," he remarked, green eyes playful.<p>

I blushed a little and smirked, rolling my eyes as I stroked his hair, returning to my original position as I sipped my own tea.

>"Quit charming me, I already gave you enough beatings the other day." I chided.<p>

Souji huffed again. "You're still pissy about that?" He wondered.

I blushed again and shook my head, lowering my gaze to the green color of the tea. "No," I replied.

He cocked his head to the side, making me look up to see his green eyes were studying me; my cheeks warmed a little and he made a face. "I can tell when you're tryin' to lie to me, Kawa," he reminded calmly.

I looked away, brushing strands of hair from my face. "Damn it," I muttered.

Souji sighed and took another sip before he stretched his limbs, lying down with his head in my lap; I blushed slightly, looking down at his half-opened green eyes that seemed to look past me at the ceiling overhead. "Souji," I began.

He closed his eyes calmly and smiled. "Even though that girl flirted with me it doesn't mean I don't love you. I chased ya too long to just drop you now." He proclaimed quietly, perking my ears.

I quieted and then smiled softly at hearing his reassuring words, nodding. "I know." I lowered a hand to stroke his hair aimlessly, brushing locks of russet brown bangs from his forehead. "Sometimes I forget that other women also recognize that you're handsome. Guess it's because I'm so used to it being just you and me, surrounded by the guys." I admitted softly.

Souji chuckled, a smirk twitching his lips upward. "So y'really think I'm that handsome, huh?" He wondered, his tone teasing.

I scoffed and rolled my eyes, smirking down at him. "Would I be letting you rest your head in my lap otherwise?" I returned.

He opened one eye up at me, a pout crossing his face; I giggled, seeing him smile softly before he sighed. "It's actually comfortable like this," he mused more to himself.

I blushed humbly and returned the soft smile, shaking my head as I ran my fingers through his shaggy hair. "Don't ruin the moment, dummy," I chided softly.

Souji chuckled again, relaxing as he exhaled softly and shifted a little to lie on his left side, his head remaining in my lap as his cheek rested on my left thigh. "I'd turn down every girl that threw herself at me. I love ya too much to ever leave you unprotected." He admitted, his voice thoughtful and soft at the same time.

I quieted and nodded, watching his right hand lift to take my hand that was in his hair, squeezing my hand gently in his grip. "I love you too." I replied.

I ****did**** love him. With all my heart, I loved him.
>Even though he was cocky, lecherous, overbearing and too damn stubborn for his own good, he was still Souji.<p>

He was ****_my_**** Souji: it was as simple as that.

* * *

><p>AN: _incase anyone noticed Kisuke was MIA in the previous chap(s) it's because he went with Heisuke to Edo to recruit more men/ one effeminate jackass *cough* |'D anywho~! we also get to see Kaoru make a cameo, the little shithead.. i'm sorry for bashing on him, i just don't like how his twisted little mind works. if he were my brother i'd have disowned him at the hip. lol _
>aside from that, more coming up so look forward to that! ;D
_

>title ref: "Life is Like a Boat" _by**_ Rie Fu_**

Chizuru: Porcelain-chan requests that you **review** please; thanks! (:

7. Bloom of the Red Lotus

A/N: ohaiyo_~ what's up? sorry for the long wait! /bows _

>srsly i've been busy writing a new fic (which i will introduce in a bit) and getting the refs right.. you know how it goes. anyway, so on to the story! where we last left off, Sannan-san had become a Fury and we also got to see Kaoru make it into the spotlight for a brief moment. the drama is on a pause for now, but it'll heat up soon. will the gang be able to withstand it: or will they crumble into pieces of broken china?
>enjoy the fic!

disclaimer: _i don't own Hakuouki; Kawa and Kisuke belong to me._

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><p>Chapter Seven: Bloom of the Red Lotus**

The short sword in my hands fell onto the floor with a small clattering noise.

I looked up at him in surprise.

"What was it?" I repeated softly, seeing my world slowly getting smaller as I stared up at his green eyes.

>He looked down at his crossed legs, lowering his gaze.

"Tuberculosis." He replied, his voice soft.<p>

I looked down at my hands to see they were trembling; my hands balled into fists, still trembling, as I looked at the dropped short sword, at the blue fabric of the hilt.

"Look, it's not like I'm gonna drop anytime soon. I'm still gonna be able to fightâ€|" He began to proclaim.

"Why?" I wondered softly.

He seemed to look up. "'Why' what?" He repeated.

My teeth clenched, grinding together. "Why you? Why does this have to happen to you!?" I demanded, my voice rising to a shout.

I wanted to kill something, I wanted to cry and sob like a child, but most of all I wanted to kill that blonde bastard for hurting Souji two years ago!|

He quieted, seeming to look down again. "Do you really think I wanted this? I still have things I want to do, I don't wanna die just yet!" He declared.

The prickling sting of tears gathering in my eyes made me wince; I closed my eyes tightly and counted to ten in the back of my head.

>"I don't want you to die!| Souji, I promised you that I'd die with you! I don't want you to die," I cried, the tears falling down my cheeks.<p>

He shuffled a little from his spot sitting in front of me before I felt his larger hands take my cheeks, holding my face gently and tilting it so I was able to see his face. "Kawa," he said softly.

I clenched my teeth and shook free of his hands, throwing my arms around his neck and embracing him tightly, feeling him lean back onto the floor as he held me.

>Souji buried his face into my hair, letting me cry as he clung to me like if I was the only thing he had left to hold onto.<p>

"I'm not gonna go anywhere. I swear that as long as I'm livin', I'm gonna be here to protect you." He promised hoarsely into my neck, his arms tightening protectively.

I sniffed and nodded slightly, closing my eyes wearily. "I love you, Souji." I replied in the same hoarse voice, feeling him run his fingers through my hair.

>He seemed to smile softly, planting a kiss on my shoulder. "I love you too, Kawa." He said.<p>

I smiled to myself at hearing those four words echo in my head as I let sleep take me into a dreamless lull.

.....oOo.....

The sound of air hitting my katana sounded as I swung the blade from one side to the next, grunting and lifting the sword high before slamming it down onto an imaginary enemy's head.

>I panted slightly, straightening and flicking my wrist, sheathing the blade wordlessly.<p>

"That was some show," he commented from sitting on the steps, perking my ears as I had almost forgot that he was sitting there watching me.

I blushed slightly before smirking gently at him, huffing. "I still think you shoulda gone inside already; keeping your hair down like that after taking a bath will worsen your condition." I remarked, slipping the sheathed sword from my sash as I went to sit with him on the steps.

Souji huffed and smirked at me with one open green eye. "Would you stop worryin'? Geez, yer starting to sound more like Hijikata-san," he mused.

I blinked before blushing slightly, lowering my gaze. "I'm just looking out for you, idiot. You know I don't wanna see youâ€|y'know," I mumbled the last word, shrugging my _katana_ onto my left shoulder.

He quieted and then exhaled, lifting a hand to stroke my cheek, tipping my chin up gently. "I know you are. Like I said, I don't intend to go anywhere soon, so don't worry." He smiled for me, his green eyes soft. "For me?" He added, making his eyes look like puppy-dog eyes.

I quieted and then shook my head softly, sighing. "Okay, for you." I held his hand that cupped my cheek, squeezing gently, as I leaned forward to bump foreheads with him, closing my eyes.

Souji seemed to smile, tucking strands of hair behind my ear, inclining his head to capture my lips in a kiss.
>I smiled softly, kissing back tenderly, feeling him stroke my cheek as he lightly nibbled on my lower lip, making me shiver slightly.<p>

The sound of someone cleaning the deck made us pull apart; my cheeks flushed as I heard him curse under his breath at the untimely intrusion, his green eyes stoic and sharp as the noise stopped and we both heard the familiar voice of Chizuru declare that she was done.

"All done?" Souji asked as he poked his head from under the stair step as I heard her yelp slightly in surprise, making me snicker quietly.

"O-Okita-san!? What're you doing out here like that!?" Chizuru barked.

"I _tried_ to get him to go back inside, but the dummy wouldn't go." I offered with a sigh as I also poked my head up to see her and smile lightly. "Yo, Chizu-chan," I greeted.

"K-Kawa-chan too!? Wh-why'd you let him dress like that?" She asked alertly.

I chuckled. "Don't blame me, ask him." I replied, jerking a thumb at the aforementioned brunette.

Souji pouted at me, making me giggle, before he sighed. "I sweated in my sleep last night, so I took a bath and decided to sunbathe." He explained calmly, looking up at her behind his back.
>Just like a cat, I thought with a smirk.

"I don't care how nice the weather is, you'll catch a cold if you stay outside with wet hair!" Chizuru barked, perking my ears.

He huffed and closed his eyes serenely. "It's fine, I can handle it." He replied in a nonchalant way.
>I made a face.<p>

She also frowned. "No it's not okay, you should take better care of yourself!" She retorted.

I blinked at her suddenly assertive tone, tilting my head to one

side. _What's up with her?_ I wondered.

"You're just like Hijikata-san the way you're such a bossy worry-wart." Souji chuckled, looking up at her with one eye before he started to put his hair into the topknot he wore.

Chizuru blushed slightly before she moved forward to dry his hair for him. "You need to dry your hair first!" She scolded, drying his hair rather roughly.

I looked away to hide a giggle.

"Chizuru-chan, why're you bein' so pushy?" Souji complained, grimacing and looking up at her with one green eye.
>"No particular reason," she replied as I watched her bully him into obeying, smiling serenely.<p>

"Oi, what're ****you**** smiling for?" He griped, looking at me.

I shrugged and leaned against the step behind me, folding my arms behind my head. "I've been tryin' to tell you to go inside because of your hair, and finally someone understands my pain." I looked at the girl and smiled lightly. "Thanks for sympathizing, Chizu-chan." I said with another smile.

She returned the smile. "You're welcome, Kawa-chan!" She replied.

Souji pouted again at being outnumbered before he sighed and looked away. "That's enough; it's mostly dry, anyway." He announced, letting her straighten and take the towel with her as he fixed his hair into the topknot.

She blushed slightly again as I straightened to my feet, stretching my arms to the sky and yawning.

>"I'd like to ask you a question: honestly, what d'ya thinks of my hairstyle?" Souji asked, looking at her.<p>

Chizuru quieted before she smiled slightly. "I think it looks good on you." She replied.

He smiled lightly. "Really? Great, thanks! Truthfully, I'm tryin' to copy Kondou-san." He explained, pointing to his topknot.

>She smiled again and laughed a little. "You're right; it's the same hairstyle as his." She mused.<p>

Souji smirked at her and winked. "Let's keep this little secret between us three, neh?" He asked.

>Chizuru chuckled. "'Kay," she replied.<p>

I smiled at him and nodded. "Deal," I mused.

He sighed and slung an arm around my shoulders, letting me hop the last two steps before he followed. "Now if you'll excuse us, we're about to go make some mad passionate love in my quarters!" He declared dramatically, starting to drag me away by his grip on my shoulders.

"E-eh!?" Chizuru and I yelped as we both blushed the same shade of red.

"H-hang on, Souji, wait a sec!" I declared, digging my heels into the ground and making him let me go.

Souji looked at me in confusion. "What's up, Kawa?" He asked.

I glanced at the girl before looking at him. "I need to ask Chizuru something, so I'll see you inside." I replied, smiling for him.

He pouted. "Aww, but Kawa!" He whined.

I kissed him lightly before pulling away. "I'll be there, don't worry. Us girls need to talk, alright?" I declared.

Souji quieted reluctantly and sighed, looking away. "Fine. But you owe me later," he wagered, shooting me a look.

>I smirked gently and waved him away. "I know, love," I replied.<p>

He smirked back and then sighed, folding his arms behind his head as he retreated back inside.

"Um, Kawa-chan, what did you want to talk about?" She asked behind me as I turned to see her looking at me with confusion written in her pretty face.

I looked in the direction Souji went and frowned softly, looking at her. "You know about his illness." I replied; it wasn't a question.

Chizuru quieted and lowered her gaze to the towel in her hands, nodding.

>"H-hai. I accidentally eavesdropped when Matsumoto-sensei told him that he had" what he had." She looked at me apologetically. "Kawa-chan, I'm sorry I didn't tell you, it's just that I promised Okita-san" She began to apologize before I wordlessly lifted a hand to stop her.

"It's okay, Chizuru, really. He told me about it, the night you guys were at Nijou Castle guarding the Shogun. I don't like it, but so long as he isn't bedridden, I'm okay with it." I rubbed my right arm gingerly, looking at her again. "Sano told me about what that blonde man said to you. That you're an _oni_." I declared quietly, moving forward to sit on the steps and invite her to sit with me.

Chizuru quieted again and looked down, sitting at my side and keeping her gaze lowered. "Do you hate me, for being what I am?" She asked softly.

I scoffed quietly and lifted a hand to rub my neck. "No, I don't. Actually, I'm a little jealous. I wish I was blessed with the superhuman blood that runs through your veins. But no, I don't hate you for what you are. I really don't." I admitted, looking at her and smiling softly.

Her eyes widened slightly before she looked up at me, her eyes softening as she smiled in relief. "I'm glad." She declared. "Thank you, Kawa-chan, for being a good friend." She added.

I smiled again and ruffled her hair gently. "You're welcome. Like I

said before, if you ever want to try and make yourself more combat-adaptable, I'd be willing to teach you." I reminded.

Chizuru blinked before she smiled sheepishly. "Thanks, Kawa-chan, but I don't think I wanna fightâ€|!" She began.

I rolled my eyes. "From what I've heard about _oni_, I know they possess super-fast regeneration abilities, as well as speed and power that make the Fury look like daisies. One of these days you're gonna have to put to the test those abilities, Chizu-chan." I interjected, looking at her.

>She lowered her gaze again. "Kawa-chan," she began.<p>

I lifted a brow. "Or is it that you're afraid to fight?" I wondered softly.

Her brown eyes shot up at my words and a frown crossed her thin brow. "I-I'm not afraid to fight! I know how to defend myself well enough, and I know how to use a short sword." She protested.

I quieted and straightened to my feet, stepping off the step to stand on the ground. "Prove it, then: hit me." I declared.

Chizuru's eyes widened. "K-Kawa-chan, I can'tâ€|!" She began worriedly.

"I'll explain everything to my brother later. You don't even have to land a critical hit, just strike with your foot or your fist."

>I placed my katana against the stair banister, lifting my hands in surrender. "See? No swords. Not even my short sword." I added, looking at her imploringly, vaguely wondering if she really had the guts to want to stick around here with us for so long.

She hesitated, clasping her hands together as she bit on her lip.

>I sighed. "Don't make me strike first, Chizuru." I requested patiently, lifting my right hand and gesturing she come forward.<p>

Chizuru hesitated for another moment before she took on a determined expression and leaped down the last two steps, releasing a battle cry as she flew at me with her right fist extended.

I caught her fist in my left hand, surprising her; I smiled softly. "There you go." I released her hand, letting her back away as I took a step back and nodded. "Go on, try again." I coaxed, sliding my right foot behind me by an inch out of reflex.

She nodded, grunting and lunging at me, extending her right foot out to kick me in the gut; I swerved to the right, making her fly past me before she skidded to a halt in time to keep herself from falling face-first onto the ground.

A chuckle escaped me as I fought an amused grin. "That's good, keep it up." I declared lightly.

Chizuru panted slightly, wiping beads of sweat from her brow. "Kawa-chan, really, I'm okayâ€|!" She began to protest.

I swung my foot at her face, watching her yelp and swerve out of the

way in time, straightening quickly and blocking the left fist that sailed to connect with my nose using my right forearm, feeling her weight descend on me and making me dig my heels into the ground; I smirked wryly, disengaging our hands and lifting my knee to connect with her belly.

Chizuru scrambled away, kicking against my shin and leaping back, her heels skidding into the ground, her doe brown eyes hardened in something I could only assume was seriousness in combat.

I smiled contently, nodding. "Not bad. Y'could uses a bit of practice, though." I admitted, shifting into the same stance I held moments ago and nodding again. "C'mon, _oni_ princess." I urged gently.

>She quieted and then nodded, sprinting at me and jumping into the air, her right foot extending to land a kick on my head.<p>

I caught her kick with my criss-crossed arms I raised to block from landing the blow to my head, gritting my teeth and forcing her away, drawing back to the steps as she landed rather lithely on the balls of her left foot, panting like I was.

I wiped sweat from my brow, perking up as she gave a brief battle cry and hurtled into me, knocking the wind out of me; my foot propelled into her belly, kicking her off as I swung my leg out to trip her.

Chizuru grimaced and rubbed her head gingerly, widening her eyes as my extended left fist was poised mere millimeters away from her small nose. "K-Kawa-chan," she breathed.

I drew my fist back, smiling again as I crouched next to her, extending my hand to help her up. "That was a bold move you pulled, at the last second," I admitted, helping her sit up as I sat down with a soft groan.

Her cheeks were flushed from sparring as she looked down at her knees. "Y-you really think I did well?" She asked.

>I nodded, rubbing her back gently. "Sorry if I sorta forced you into it." I apologized.<p>

Chizuru looked at me before her brown eyes softened. "It's alright; I guess I just needed some motivation is all." She shrugged.

I smiled softly, lifting a hand to ruffle her hair. "'Motivation' my ass; you had it in ya to attack without much hesitation." I gingerly shuffled to my feet, moving away to hoist my _katana_ and sling it over my shoulder casually. "C'mon, I'm pretty sure it's almost time for dinner," I urged, smirking gently at her.

She nodded, straightening as well before we walked away to the dining hall.

* * *

><p>He almost spat out his tea. "You **what**?" He balked.

I fought the amused smirk that wanted to overcome my lips, sipping my tea casually. "Don't act like you don't see it." I

replied.

"Yasakawa, are you mad? She's just a girl! And besides, you had no right to try and force her into sparring!" He began to protest angrily.

"She's old enough to defend herself. She just needs motivation and a teacher. I can provide both things." I met his aggravated violet stare and held it. "Nii-san, whether you care to admit it or not, you can't protect her forever. So long as I teach her to fight, Chizuru will be able to stand on her own feet and not have to stare at a man's back as he fights for her safety." I explained softly.

Toshi's brow tightened into a glare and he lowered his gaze to the half-empty tea cup, lip curled in a grimace. "You know her race," he mumbled.

I nodded. "I do, yes. I've seen what they're capable of, and to be honest, it's a far cry from the Fury we've created. I'm not saying I want to worship the ground they walk on, because I don't. But being what she is, and being a woman in a man's world, she has to strengthen up. I'm also not saying that I'm trying to decide what's best for her, either: I'm not her mother. But considering I am older than her by a few years, I feel that I should help her in the one way I know I can help. And that's fighting." I stated.

He quieted and closed his eyes before releasing a slow exhale. "If anything happens to her, it's on your head, you realize?" He reminded.

I nodded again. "I know," I replied.

He nodded slightly, lifting his gaze to meet mine. "I hate it when you're right," he muttered in defeat.

I smiled wryly, sipping my tea. "I have no idea what you're talking about, dear brother." I said serenely.
>His left eye twitched. "The hell you don't, brat." He grumbled sorely, perking my ears.<p>

I scowled, feeling my own right eye twitch annoyedly; that hated term '_brat_' was almost as bad as when he referred to me by my full name. "Stow it, _oni_." I sniffed cattily.

Toshi quieted at the name before he smirked slightly, sipping his tea. "You've lived with us for four years already and it's still hard to get accustomed to hearing my own half-sister refer to me that way." He mused.

I tilted my head to one side, smirking. "Get used to it, then, nii-san, because I intend to stick around for as long as possible." I remarked, downing the rest of my tea before yawning and stretching my arms to the ceiling, rubbing the back of my neck as I shuffled and straightened to my feet, gathering my _katana_ from lying on the floor next to where I sat.

"Maybe you've hung around Souji too long; you're starting to act like a cat." He said thoughtfully as I walked to the door.

I looked at him and giggled, smirking gently. "I ****do**** love cats." I

mused, smiling lightly. "Good night, Toshi. And don't worry, 'kay? I'll make sure I keep an eye on your girl." I added, perking his ears.

Toshi's cheeks burned a shade of reddish pink and his eyes narrowed as he shot me a glare full of daggers. "Just go to bed, cat-lover." He growled cattily, his left eye twitching annoyedly.

I laughed quietly and winked. "Night, nii-san!" I said lightly, slipping out into the night and closing his door behind me, folding my arms behind my head as I retreated to my room.

* * *

><p>The faint sound of someone playing a shamisen hung in the air.

I huffed under my breath, arms crossed over my chest.
>I didn't see why we had to celebrate getting paid for protecting that damn bulletin board by going to Shimabara.<p>

Of all placesâ€¦ we had perfectly good _sake_ at home!

Honestly, men are such _pigs_â€¦

"Of course, not everyone here can drink, y'know; neh, Kawa-chan?" Souji wondered lightly, dragging me into the inn by the hand.
>I glanced over my shoulder at my brother and snickered. "Right," I agreed calmly.<p>

Okay, maybe the reason I was pissy about this was because the guys just wanted to come gawk at the geisha. It's not that I was jealous of them! The boys could stare at those sluts all they wanted; they weren't attached to someone elseâ€¦ not like Souji was to me.

Was I just being paranoid?

I huffed again, looking at his back as he continued to lead me past the different rooms to the room the servant was leading us to, looking at his brown hair; my eyes softened and I smiled a little.

'I'm not all that interested in places like this.' Souji had commented a few years ago.

He had come along to pacify the boys.

It made much more sense now, than if he was coming to drool over the geisha.
>Honestly, Soujiâ€¦<p>

.....oOo.....

A sweatdrop formed on my brow at his insistence of her drinking.

>"Geez, kind of glad I wasn't the first to get hammered," I mumbled around sipping from my cup.<p>

"Kawa-chan, aren't you gonna get drunk easily?" Chizuru asked at my side, perking my ears.

I blinked before smirking softly and huffing. "Don't lump me together with my brother. Just because one of us can't handle drinking doesn't mean the both of us can't drink." I assured her lightly.

Souji sighed calmly at my right and slung his arm around my shoulders. "Yep, that's our princess. Ta be honest, she's as good at holding her liquor as the rest of us." He mused with a smirk.
>I blushed slightly and smirked, elbowing him gently. "Honestly," I muttered with a patient exhale.<p>

"I heard that Hijikata-san from the Shinsengumi was horrible like an _oni_, but you're as handsome as an actor." The geisha tending to our group, Kimigiku, commented lightly in that thick accent geisha were known for (which was highly overrated, in my book).

Toshi's cheeks looked rosy as he sipped from his cup. "I get that a lot," he mused coolly.

Heisuke and Shinpachi spat out their drinks simultaneously; I almost choked on my own drink before Souji whacked me on the back as both aforementioned captains guffawed at his response.
>"T-the hell ya hear that a lot; that's bullshit, Toshi!" I coughed, glaring up at my brother annoyedly.

"Yasakawa-san, I must admit that I am truly envious of you to be near a handsome man such as your commander." Kimigiku said rather sorely, still keeping that light and accented tone, perking my ears.

I blinked before I laughed softly. "Don't be, Kimigiku-san. Besides, you'll have to forgive my brother for being weak-willed when it comes to _sake_. The prolonged-buzz gene skipped a generation it appears." I replied with a smirk.

She covered her mouth to hide a chuckle as my brother looked at me sorely, his eye twitching. "Idiocy skipped my generation as well," he remarked with a huff.

I pouted and then pulled my right eyelid down, blowing him a raspberry. "Piss off." I griped, downing my _sake_ on purpose, my cheeks warming at the intake of the strong drink.

"You got all this money just protecting the billboard; just imagine how much money we could've gotten if you caught the culprits!" Shinpachi's slightly slurred voice perked my ears as we looked to him.

"Yeah, seriously," Heisuke chimed.

"Oi, Sano, why _did_ you let them go? You coulda handled eight guys easy!" Shinpachi asked as he and the younger captain looked at Sano.

I tapped my chin with my index finger thoughtfully: why did he do that? Eight guys were easy for a captain of the Shinsengumi, let alone a lanky man like Harada Sanosuke. What made him not take them into custody?

He looked at the girl. "Chizuru, were you out somewhere that night?"

He asked.

She blinked and then shook her head. "No," she replied.

His gold eyes tightened. "You're sure?" He pressed.

"Yeah, I don't leave headquarters at night." Chizuru said, slightly confused on his questions.

"She's not lying, Sano; I didn't hear her sneak out or anything along those lines that night. We were both sleeping in the same room when dawn came." I piped up calmly, meeting his gold eyes.

"What's the big deal, Sano?" Shinpachi wondered of his friend.

"Actually, a girl who resembled Chizuru got in our way when we were apprehending those Tosa guys. Then everything fell out of formation." Sano explained darkly, slightly surprising everyone.
>That explains things, I thought.

"That's horrible," she said softly.

Souji looked over at her. "Maybe it's that girl you met while conducting rounds with Heisuke, Kawa and me. Wasn't she Nagumo Kaoru?" He asked, perking my ears.

I huffed. "That sure as hell explains it; I thought I smelled something rotten about her." I declared lowly, ignoring my left eye's twitch at hearing her name and remembering how she'd flirted shamelessly with Souji in front of me.
>That little ****bitch****, I thought, cursing her.

"She looked just like you." He mused, seeming to ignore my comment; I shot him a look, huffing and looking away as I downed another shot.

>She looked down. "But that's not enough evidenceâ€|" She began.<p>

"I didn't really think so; after all, she was dressed like a girl." Heisuke defended.

>"Then why don't we put her in a kimono to confirm it?" Saitou wondered from his quiet corner spot at Souji's right.<p>

The room went quiet.

****Eh**!**? Chizuru balked in something akin to horror, looking from Saitou to Heisuke to Souji.

"Dress Chizuru up!" Heisuke exclaimed.

"That's it; that's a great idea!" Shinpachi chimed as they both jumped to their feet. "Hey, Kimigiku-san! Sorry, but could you dress this kid up as a girl?" He asked the geisha.

****EHH**!**? She shrieked in downright shock and horror.

"You allâ€|" Toshi began to growl and get up before Kimigiku placed a hand up to stop him, glancing at the girl before smiling at Shinpachi. "Very well; I shall accept your request." She said

lightly, making Toshi's cheeks redden at the prospect of seeing her dressed like a girl.

I sweatdropped as Kimigiku dragged the girl to the back rooms to change, looking at both Heisuke and Shinpachi.

"Honestlyâ€|"

THWACK.

THWACK.

>"OW!" Both men yelped in chorus, a large bump on both of their heads.

"**Idiots**, yer lucky she doesn't know how to kill yet otherwise you'd both be deader than dust!" I exclaimed annoyedly, hands on my hips.

"If you're complaining so much, why don't you **join** her and dress in a kimono? It's very rare that we see you act feminine." Saitou wondered calmly, sipping his drink; my right eye twitched.

THWACK.

"I knew ya were a pervert deep down, you idiot samurai." I growled as I cracked my knuckles and shuffled to sit back down at Souji's left.

The aforementioned brunette snickered at the red bump that swelled on his friend's head, sipping from his cup. "That's my girl," he mused lightly, flashing that cat smile of his.

>My cheeks warmed; I rolled my eyes, pouring myself another shot. "Quiet, you," I grumbled.<p>

Toshi rolled his eyes as well at the sight of three out of the six men sporting bumps on their heads, smirking rather amusedly. "And that is the reason why you're the only woman strong enough to stick with us this long," he mused.

I blinked and then smiled over at him, laughing softly. "And don't you forget it." I remarked, seeing him return the smile before he straightened to step outside onto the balcony, closing the door behind his exit.

"Sorry for the wait, everyone." Kimigiku declared lightly as the door slid open to reveal Chizuru entering the room first, dressed in a maroon kimono with a blue obi tied in the front.

The boys gawked at the sight of her looking so pretty; I rolled my eyes at them, giggling. "Honestly," I grumbled.

"H-hey, are you really Chizuru?" Heisuke stammered, blush staining his cheeks pink.

>"Y-yes," she mumbled.<p>

"Chizu-chan, you look beautiful!" I declared lightly.

"What a transformation; I didn't recognize you for a second, there." Souji mused lightly.

>I backhanded his head, pouting. "Idiot, you're makin' her

embarrassed!" I scolded.<p>

"So; what do you think, Sano?" Saitou asked, looking at the lanky brunette.

The blush stained his cheeks a reddish pink as he looked at the girl thoughtfully. "I'm not sure; Chizuru's so damn pretty I can't decide." He mused with a smirk.

"Geez, Sanoâ€|" I began to scold again.

Souji sighed and pulled me to his chest aimlessly, making me squeak. "Quit motherin', love." He chided gently, squeezing my hips. >I blushed and exhaled, obeying as I felt him squeeze again. "Yeah," I mumbled.<p>

Sometimes I hated it when he would show affection in public; I looked at everyone in the room and my eyes softened. >But then again, we were like family around each other, so public affection was okay.<p>

* * *

><p>AN: _so that was a technical-filler chap. sorry for not updating sooner! ^^; anyway, i felt like Kawa should take it upon herself to train Chizuru to be able to defend herself better. a little sibling love between Toshi and Kawa as well as Kawa's reaction to Souji's TB diagnosis to add into the mix. i hope to update soon so look forward to that, neh?_

Saitou: Porcelain-san requests that you **review** please. /bows

8. Untitled - Responsible

A/N: _sorry for the long wait! i've been busy getting ref for my IY fic (___**We Are**__) so i feel bad for neglecting this fic. anyway, last chap was a filler and this chap is more action-y. enjoy the chap!_

disclaimer: _i don't own Hakuouki; Kawa and Kisuke belong to me._

* * *

><p>Chapter Eight: Untitled - Responsible**

The sound of footsteps stirred me from my sleep.

My eyes shot open at the noise; I reached for my _katana_, sitting up as I noticed Chizuru had awoken too, both of us looking at the figure's silhouette that stood infront of our door.

"Who's there?" She asked hesitantly; the door was thrown open as the figure stepped inside.

I perked up alertly to see it was a Fury; _shit!_ I thought, quietly unsheathing my blade.

>"Bloodâ€| bloodâ€| give me blood!" The Fury growled as he lunged at

her.<p>

I flew at him, slicing at his shoulder.

The Fury growled and scrambled away from me, the wound regenerating quickly before he lunged at the girl.

"**SOUJI**! **TOSHI**!" I yelled as Chizuru screamed, the sound of cloth ripping perking my ears. "Chizuru!" I exclaimed alertly.

The rushing of feet sounded as Toshi appeared first before he flew at the Fury, slicing at his open back.

>"Nii-san," I breathed in relief.<p>

"Yasakawa, get back, now; Chizuru, get away quick!" He ordered, pushing me behind him protectively as the girl made to run forward when a pale hand caught her ankle, making her cry out in fear.

"No, Chizuru!" I barked, widening my eyes slightly as the Fury's injury on his back regenerated.

Sano's spear tip stabbed into the Fury's wrist, making him let her go, making me look up to see the boys had come too, Souji pushing past the worried Heisuke to pull me to his side.

"Bloodâ€¦!" The Fury exclaimed as he stood, perking my ears as Toshi shielded the girl with his left arm.

"Looks like he won't be able to listen to us," Shinpachi grumbled.

>"Give me blood!" The Fury snarled as he lunged at Chizuru again.<p>

Toshi sliced at his chest; he fell back with a gurgle, Sano's spear stabbing into his heart, tossing him into a door panel and making the panel crash onto the porch loudly.

"Why did heâ€¦?" Heisuke began to wonder.

"My apologies; I didn't keep a close watch on him." Sannan-san apologized as he came forward.

>"Sannan-san," I greeted in slight relief.<p>

"Sannan-kun, what's going on?" Kondou-san asked as he paused short of standing over the dead Fury.

"I'm not sure myself," he mused, looking down at the body before looking at the girl. "Yukimura-kun, are you alright? And Yasakawa-kun as well," he asked, glancing at me as I stood at Souji's left, his arm hugging my waist.

I nodded. "Yeah, we're okay." I replied quietly, sheathing my _katana_.

Chizuru rubbed her arm gingerly. "I'm fine," she replied as he came forward to look at her wound.

"You're not fine; this much bloodâ€¦!" He began, lifting a hand to touch her wound, blood staining his fingers; his eyes widened as he stiffened.

>"Sannan-san?" She wondered; he cried out in pain, clutching his head.<p>

"Sannan-san!" Sano barked.

"Shit," I grumbled, watching his hair turn white as snow and his eyes redden.

"Move away, Chizuru," Toshi snatched her out of the way and behind his back as he and Saitou blocked Sannan-san.

Sannan-san looked around at us before whirling on the girl that was blocked by both Saitou and Toshi. "Blood! I need blood!" he began to growl before pain radiated from his neck, his hands flying to grip his throat.

"Damn, even Sannan-san was affected by the scent of blood?" Shinpachi wondered annoyedly.

"Blood! give me blood!" Sannan-san cackled as he neared the girl, making both Saitou and Toshi skirt around him to another side of the room.

"We have no choice now," Heisuke grumbled as he drew his katana.

>I drew my katana, perking up as Souji stayed my hand with his own clamping on mine; I looked up at him. "Souji," I began, seeing him shake his head.

"We'll attack together," Sano amended.

"Wait," Toshi declared, making us look to see Sannan-san cry out and resist the urge before he returned to normal, bowing slightly as he panted.

I sighed in relief.

"Sannan-san?" Chizuru asked hesitantly.

>He looked at her. "Yukimura-kun! what did I do?" He wondered, looking around at us. "I see; I behaved like him!" He muttered in shame.<p>

"What's all this ruckus about!?" A shrill effeminate voice barked near us, perking my ears.

We looked to see Itou-san coming forward, pissed as much as I'd ever seen him. "Can one of you explain! e-eh!? S-S-Sannan-san!?" Itou-san shrieked in horror.

I sweatdropped and felt a vein twitch on my brow.

"Y-you should be d-dead! How!?" He balked.

"Calm down, Itou-san. I'll explain it in the morning," Kondou-san leaped into action, ushering the distraught girly man down the porch back to his room.

"How can I be calm!? You owe me a good explanation for this!" Itou-san demanded shrilly, his voice echoing down the walkway.

"We've been discovered; should we kill him?" Souji wondered as he crossed his arms at his chest.
>I sweatdropped and smirked at him. "Get in line, I'll kill him." I replied.<p>

Toshi looked at the girl. "You will stay in my room tonight. And let Yamazaki bandage that wound for you." He instructed.
>"I'm alright," she defended quietly.<p>

"You're not alright; Yamazaki is the head of medical services, andâ€¦|" Toshi argued.

"I'm fine! I can take care of it myself." Chizuru barked, surprising him; she quieted and looked away, skirting past us to go to his room.

I watched her and smiled softly, elbowing Souji. "Come on, killer, I'm bunking with you tonight." I said with a sigh, flashing a smile at my brother before I yawned.

Souji smirked gently at me, taking my hand and dragging me away to his room. "Nighty-night!" He said lightly over his shoulder before we rounded the corner.

I smiled up at him and shook my head. "Someone's eager," I mused lightly.

He returned the smile, green eyes gentle. "The woman I love is asking to share the same bed with me, 'course I'm eager." He remarked teasingly.

My cheeks warmed and I looked away slightly huffing. "Geez, Soujiâ€¦|" I grumbled, perking up as we came to his room; he slid the door open, ushering me inside before closing the door.

He smirked at me as I noted that his room was larger than my room was, his fingers tipping my chin up. "Not scared are you? I won't bite. Much~," he wondered, green eyes glittering in his playfulness.

I blushed again, rolling my eyes. "Sleep, Souji. **Sleep**." I replied, patting his cheek gently.

Souji pouted, humphing; I giggled softly, smirking at him.

My fingers gently pulled his chin down as I kissed him tenderly; he quieted and then smiled softly, his arms wrapping around my waist as he held me close and kissed back.

>I gently pushed his chest to pull away, seeing him pout sorely; I smiled gently, taking his hand and leading him to the unmade futon.<p>

He pulled me into a second kiss, holding me close, before he held me to his chest and ran his fingers through my hair.
>I blushed and smiled softly, curling up with him and closing my eyes as we both fell asleep in each other's arms.<p>

* * *

><p>"Such willful behavior can't be tolerated!" He declared angrily.<p>

"I didn't expect that he would move so quickly; damn sneaky slime." He chimed grimly.

"What happened?" She asked as she came forward, approaching Inoue-san first.

>"Itou-san said that he'll be leaving the Shinsengumi." Inoue-san informed, surprising her.<p>

"Itou-san said that?" Chizuru balked.

I stretched my arms with a yawn. "Yep, the slimy rat bastard is finally leaving. And it's about damn time, too; his ego has been taking up too much space here." I mused.

Souji chuckled, smirking at me. "Glad that makes two of us that hated him bein' here, love." He mused.

>I smiled at him, folding my arms behind my head.<p>

It was about time Itou-san left; of course I wasn't happy that both Heisuke and Saitou were going with the slimy girly man, but if it was for the good of the Shinsengumi, then I couldn't say much, could I?

Of course I'd miss both of my friends, but if they wanted to go then I had no say in the matter.

Someone poked my belly; I yelped, slightly doubling over to cover my sides, hearing him snicker. "T-that wasn't funny, Souji!" I scolded, blushing and scowling up at him.

He smirked at me, ruffling my hair. "Ya looked so depressed, yer gonna ruin your gorgeous looks with that frown!" He remarked, his green eyes soft.

I blushed again and met his gaze, smiling. "Sorry." I mumbled.

::::oo:::~

The sound of bullets going off rang out near the gates.

He tried to get up. "I'm coming with you," he declared, perking my ears as I slipped my katana into the sash at my waist.

I shook my head, smiling at him. "You stay here; I'll be fine." I ducked to kiss him hard.

>Souji pulled me into a deep kiss, pressing his forehead against mine. "Don't get killed," he breathed, flashing his cat-like smile at me.<p>

I smiled back, gingerly and reluctantly slipping free of his arms to slip out of the room before I sprinted down the porch to the noise, katana held tight in hand.

According to what Sano had mentioned about the Kinmon no Hen incident a few years ago, there had been one of the reported oni who used a Western revolver.

Did they come to kill us in our sleep?
>Or did they come for Chizuru like that girl said they
would?<p>

Either way, they were trespassing on the territory of the Wolves of Mibu!

"Kawa!" I perked up as Toshi, Shinpachi, Sano and Kisuke were running in the same direction I was headed, meeting my brother's violet gaze.

>"Why aren't you in your room?" Toshi demanded as I flanked Shinpachi's right.<p>

I huffed. "I was taking care of Souji; where's Chizuru?" I returned.

"She's alright, Shimada has her covered." Kisuke informed, perking up as we all skidded to a halt at seeing the Fury that Sannan-san had gathered into the Fury Corps lying about the large courtyard.

"Shit," I grumbled, drawing my katana.

The blonde Kazama turned to disappear into the deeper recesses of the compound, leaving us to the redhead behemoth Amagiri and the purple-haired oni Sano called Shiranui.

Bastard, I thought, leaping at the giant and swinging my katana at his face; he plowed a fist into my gut, making me yelp slightly as I fell back.

"Bastard!" Toshi flew at him, Shinpachi following him.

I rubbed my head gingerly, looking to see Sano, Sannan-san (in Fury form) and Kisuke fighting against Shiranui, the clashing of blades ringing in the night with the sharp sound of bullets flying resounding.

I remembered that night at Ikedaya and gingerly straightened, grunting and flying forward at Amagiri as he threw Shinpachi aside.

He swiped for my throat, missing as I fainted to the right and flicked my wrist, grazing his cheek; he grabbed hold of my scruff, making me grimace and wriggle.

"You humans really are persistent." He mused in that low voice of his, tightening his grip on my scruff as he prepared to strike again.

I huffed and smirked at him, my hand tightening on the hilt of my katana. "It's the reason I can't afford to let slimy oni shit like you hurt my family!" I rammed my right foot into his broad chest, forcing him to let me go.

"Kawa," Kisuke placed a hand on my back as I coughed and regained my breath, his cobalt eyes hard and worried at the same time.
>I smiled wryly at him, hearing Sano say Chizuru's name in surprise; we both looked up to see Kazama walking forward, an unconscious

Chizuru held over his shoulder.<p>

"Let Chizuru go!" Shinpachi snarled at him.

He paused short of a few yards away from my brother, dropping her onto the ground. "Try and get her back, then." He challenged.

Toshi smirked at him. "Interesting, intruding on the Shinsengumi's grounds, I won't tolerate any more incursions from you!" He lunged at him, the sound of blades clashing ringing loudly in the air once more.

"Kisuke, keep Amagiri busy," I urged, clapping his shoulder before I hurried to the girl's side as Toshi and Kazama were fighting several yards away from the unconscious girl. "Chizuru," I declared, shaking her shoulders to try and wake her; she stirred, opening her brown eyes up at me.

"K-Kawa," she seemed to tune in to the blades clashing before she gasped and looked about to see my brother fighting.
"Hijikata-san!"

Toshi grunted and forced Kazama away, chipping the edge of his katana; he marveled in it for a brief moment before he lunged at my brother, the clashing of blades ringing in my ears, somehow managing to knock his katana from his hands, forcing him back.

"Toshi!" I exclaimed, sprinting to his aid.

"Stop!" Chizuru rushed in, her short sword clashing with his katana; I skidded to a halt, eyes wide. "Chizuru," I began in awe; he gritted his teeth and then huffed, disengaging the blades and swinging at her, being blocked as she lifted her short sword horizontally, small sparks flying in the air.

"For an oni princess, you're pretty good." He mused lowly, bearing down on her.

She grunted and "miraculously" forced him back, blades disengaging before she panted slightly. "Leave him alone!" She flew at him, her sword held high.

He blocked her, ramming a foot into her gut and throwing her back, katana held overhead as he went for the final blow.

"How many times have I told you not to interfere?" Toshi growled as he pulled her close, lifting the short sword to defend her.

>Nii-san, I thought in surprise, seeing Kazama paused short of delivering the death blow, a grimace marring his handsome face.

"Why do you choose to side with mere humans? You'll be betrayed in the end! You've seen these imitation demons that they've made. What meaning is there in staying with the fools who've created them?" Kazama demanded angrily.

"Even so, I believe in them!" Chizuru breathed.

He kept his glare on her for a longer moment before he lowered the

katana and sheathed it, shoulders slumping.

Shiranui chortled. "Kazama, you've been dumped, huh?" He jeered lightly.

>Kazama scowled. "What a letdown, let's go." He declared, turning to lead the way away from them.<p>

I exhaled softly in relief, sheathing my _katana_. _I'm glad they're gone_, I thought.

"Account for casualties and damage." Toshi instructed as Chizuru sank to her knees.

"Roger!"

"I understand."

I walked to her side, kneeling next to her to see she was shaking a little, preferably from the adrenaline; I placed a hand on her shoulder gently.

Her brown eyes lifted to meet my gray gaze and she looked like she was on the verge of tears. "K-Kawa," she began weakly.

>I smiled gently, ruffling her hair. "You did great." I praised, placing an arm around her shoulders and letting her hold onto me.<p>

Even though I was the little sister between Toshi and myself, I felt like an older sister to this girl; human or _oni_, we had a family in the Shinsengumi and there was nothing that was ever going to change that.

"Are you alright?" Sano asked, making us both look up at him.

"Harada-san," she said softly in surprise as he crouched before her, planting a hand on her head and ruffling her hair.

"You did well. Both of you." He declared, smirking at me; I smiled slightly and nodded. His gold eyes returned to her and he smiled lightly.

>"B-because of me, everyoneâ€|" She began weakly.<p>

Sano smirked gently and nodded her head in the same manner. "Don't make that face. It's a man's duty to protect a woman, Chizuru. We were able to fight with more strength than usual because of you. Hijikata-san, Shinpachi-san and Kisuke-san too." He interjected, looking at the three aforementioned men.

Chizuru sniffed and rubbed her nose gingerly. "Harada-san, everyone, thank you." She declared.

I smiled at her, glancing at my brother to see him retreat to his quarters, helping her up. "Come on, it's been a long day." I urged gently, ushering her back to our room.

She smiled weakly at me. "Thank you, Kawa-chan." She added, perking my ears as we made it back to the porch and were headed back.

>I blinked and tilted my head to one side. "For what?" I asked.<p>

Chizuru smiled again, glancing at her short sword. "For helping me get stronger. Kawa-chan, can you please train me?" She asked.

I quieted before I smiled again and nodded. "Of course." I replied, seeing her face brighten.

>She smiled lightly. "Thank you, Kawa-chan!" She said.<p>

In a man's world, it was always our job as females to be as strong as they were.

* * *

><p>AN: _yes i had to put a little shot of Chizuru acting tough. living with the Shinsengumi and Kawa for three years already it's about damn time she acts tough lol_

Souji: yo, **review** this fic! i'd hafta kill ya otherwise~ ;)

9. Untitled 02 - Cloudless

A/N: _**IHUMBLYPOLOGIZEFORNOTUPDATINGSOONERIONLYHOPEYOULOT CANFORGIVEME /bows low

>_

>*cough* on another note~ last chap had more action-y shots in it and Chizuru finally acts tough! hah apparently spending three years with the Shinsengumi has finally toughened up our 90%-of-the-time-damsel. lol anyway, on with the chap! enjoy.

disclaimer: i don't own Hakuouki; Kawa and Kisuke belong to me.

* * *

><p>Chapter Nine : Untitled 02 - Cloudless**

He seemed to pout as I returned from the kitchen with a fresh bowl of soup, slipping inside the room and closing the door behind me from the back hall. "If you think yer gonna force that down my throat, you're delusional." He warned.

I shot him a look before sighing, placing the tray with the soup and rice ball before him. "Would you rather I spilled it on your crotch instead? It's pretty hot," I rebutted patiently, crossing my arms in the sleeves of my _haori_.

He grumbled something unintelligible under his breath and took my threat to heart, saying thanks for the food before he started on the soup.

I smiled in relief, sipping my tea and looking over at the stand that held his _katana_ and short sword, lowering my gaze to the tea in my hands.

>His tuberculosis was starting to get worse, and the new change in weather didn't lighten his condition. This was the third time he was bedridden.<p>

"Don't look so mopey. You'll ruin your gorgeous looks that way." He chided quietly, perking my ears as I realized I'd been staring hard at his swords.

I blushed, bowing my gaze and huffing, brushing locks of black hair from my face, "sorry. Just thinking," I mumbled.

Souji seemed to frown before he sighed, the sigh being turned into a short tight cough as he started on another coughing fit.

I perked up and shuffled to his side, rubbing his back soothingly as he coughed into the handkerchief he'd kept in his robe, eyes shut tight; I winced and closed my eyes, hearing his breathing relax slowly until he was just wheezing softly. "Souji," I spoke, looking at him as his green eyes opened partly.

He mustered a scoff, cracking a dry smirk, "geez, some man I am, making you worry over me like this. I can't protect you when I'm hacking a fuggin' kidney," he grumbled.

I shook my head and wrapped my arms around his shoulders, holding onto him as I rested my cheek against his left arm. "Don't act like such an idiot; you can't shoulder this on your own. Not with me around, anyway." I scolded gently.

Souji looked up at me with one green eye, lifting his right hand to clap over my left, squeezing. "I'm not gonna just let you get sick too, dummy. Even if I do act like an idiot, at least I'd die knowin' I could keep you alive." He ignored the shiver that ran down my spine at the mention of his death.

I clung onto his hand, nuzzling into his arm. "I'm not going to watch you die. I won't let you die on me, Okita Souji. I swear on my life." I vowed solemnly.

He quieted and then smirked softly, chuckling. "You're one hell of a woman, y'know that?" He mused softly.

I blushed and then smiled, looking at his hand holding mine. "I kind of have to be, surrounded by so many men. And keeping your head above water," I replied.

He smiled and put the handkerchief away, his left hand sliding to wrap around my waist and bring me closer. "I need you, to keep me above water" and to keep me sane. That's why I won't die; I couldn't handle leaving with the regret of leaving you heartbroken and in pain." He admitted softly.

I widened my eyes a little, "Souji," I spoke in awe at hearing that from him.

Souji smiled at me, planting a tender kiss on my forehead.

:::::::::oOo:::::::::

"Saitou-kun!" I smiled in relief at seeing his familiar stoic face seated at Kondou-san's left.

Kisuke smirked, "we were startin' to wonder if you hadn't turned on

us to join with Itou-san." He mused to his friend.

"So why is he here?" Shinpachi demanded curiously, seeming to speak on behalf of everyone else.

"From today onward Saitou is once again with the Shinsengumi." Toshi informed.

"What's going on?" Sano asked in confusion.

Kondou-san smiled, "Saitou-kun, acting under Toshi's orders, was trying to infiltrate Itou's faction."

"C'mon, Hajime-kun; you actually had so much fun behind my back!" Souji teased with a light smile.

>I smiled at him as we both were seated in the corner, glad that he'd gotten the strength lately to stretch his legs.<p>

"Kondou-san, yer pretty mean, too!" Shinpachi grated as he rubbed his neck.

Kondou-san laughed weakly, "Well it was top-secret, after all! I apologize for keeping everyone in the dark!"

"I'll go get some tea," Chizuru announced as she shuffled to her feet and walked to the door.

"Make sure it's really hot, Yukimura-kun!" Kondou-san replied lightly.

"_Hai!_" She chirped.

The room quieted once she'd left, returning to the main issue at hand.

Saitou took the floor, "regarding the Itou faction, they're doubtlessly engaging in what's considered as aggressive action toward the Shinsengumi."

"'Aggressive action'?" Inoue-san repeated in confusion.

"In order to undermine the Shogunate's authority, that bastard Itou plans to make the information regarding the Fury Corps public. The rumor that Harada was involved in Sakamoto's assassination was also spread by him in an attempt to implicate the Shinsengumi." Toshi informed grimly.

"What?" Shinpachi balked.

I scoffed, "Souji was right; we shoulda ran him through when we had the damn chance! that slimy coward."

"There's one other pressing issue." Saitou spoke again, earning the room's attention. "The Itou faction is plotting to assassinate the commander of the Shinsengumi." He spoke gravely.

Souji looked stoic, "Kondou-san?"

"As much as I hate to admit this, Okita-san had a point: we really should've killed Itou the first chance we had." Kisuke ground between

slightly gritted teeth at hearing news that Kondou-san was to be assassinated.

"Nii-san, what're we going to do?" I asked, meeting my brother's violet eyes.

He seemed to sigh, a trademark scowl on his brow. "Our only option is to kill Itou-san." He stated to the room.

"And take out the imperial tomb guard as well?" Sano guessed.

Kondou-san's shoulders slumped, "we have no choice."

"What about Heisuke?" Shinpachi asked sharply.

Toshi looked grave again. "If he chooses to oppose us, we'll kill him."

Kisuke's cobalt gaze widened slightly; he lowered his head and balled his hands that rested on his calves into fists.

"Kisuke-kun," I made to touch his arm.

He shook me off, slightly surprising me; his blue stare locked on my gray before his shoulders slumped from their tenseness, looking away. "Sir," he grumbled an oblige.

Toshi straightened and shuffled to the door, sliding it wide open so he passed by the baffled Chizuru that kneeled in the doorway, ignoring her call as he disappeared down the dark porch.

I frowned after him, exhaling shakily and running a hand through my hair: I hated sticky situations.

"Is that okay: don't you guys care!?" Chizuru blurted out angrily, perking my ears.

"Chizuru," I began to quiet her.

"How can we not care?" Kondou-san interjected, quieting her before I could, his tone sad. "Even Toshi really wants to keep him safe." He said with his eyes closed, straightening and shuffling out of the room, signaling that the meeting was adjourned.

Sano rose to follow him out into the cold night, "we also hope that Heisuke will come back." He told her quietly.

Kisuke stood too, looking at me; his blue eyes softened slightly and he allowed a tight smile to cross his lips before he followed Sano and Kondou-san without a word.

I exhaled shakily again and looked at my companion, "c'mon, you need sleep." I declared quietly, sliding the back door open.

Souji shuffled to his feet, exiting before me.

I looked over at Saitou and then at Chizuru, smiling faintly, before I followed and closed the door behind our leave.

"You're pissy," I mused to him once we were nearing the room he and I shared (we'd changed sleeping arrangements after moving to the new location, deciding to let Chizuru have her own room for the first time since she joined us).

He shook his head, looking at me with slightly sad green eyes; the eyes brightened a little and he smiled for me. "Don't worry, 'kay? Heisuke's got a good head on his shoulders; he'll come crawlin' back to us in no time." He mused.

I smiled back, sliding the door open to our room and letting him in first before I followed and closed the door behind me.

"I know, I justâ€¦ I was kind of worried about Kisuke. He and Heisuke are friends, so I can imagine him hearing that we'd probably have to kill Heisuke if he turned on us is hard for him to handle." I explained, rubbing my arm.

Souji nodded, cupping my cheek. "Don't worry so much; you'll ruin your gorgeous looks." He scolded gently.

I smiled, embracing him and sighing into his shoulder; he wrapped his arms around my hips, his fingers digging into the fabric of my haori. "Leave it to you to try and cheer me up in a time like this," I chuckled.

He nuzzled my neck. "I never liked seein' you frown, least of all cry." He remarked, lifting one hand to undo my hair-tie and let my hair down, his fingers running through the thick black locks.

I nodded, resting my cheek against his chest. "I still think you love me too much sometimes," I mused.

He buried his nose into the crook of my neck, planting a soft kiss on the skin. "Guilty as charged, princess." He seemed to smile.
>I shivered and held onto him tighter, closing my eyes.<p>

* * *

><p>"The rest of this is up to you guys." Kondou-san nodded to us.<p>

Sano and Shinpachi nodded.

I folded my arms in the sleeves of my red haori.

"Speakin' of which, who can I kill?" Souji asked in his teasing tone, earning a look from my brother.

Toshi scowled, "you go to sleep; what can you do in that condition?" He scolded.

"I ****do**** bear grudges, Hijikata-san," Souji chuckled dryly.

I rolled my eyes and waved, "don't go acting like an idiot, nii-san." I warned.

"That goes double for you, cat lover." Toshi rebutted; Kondou-san kept his eyes on us before he followed.

"Oi, what does he mean by '_cat lover'?_ Didn't figure we had cats around here," Shinpachi wondered.

Sano elbowed him, "idiot, Souji acts like a cat, and Kawa is with himâ€¦| So?" He hinted, ignoring the green glare.

I sweatdropped and punched the lanky brunette in the arm affectionately, "piss off you two. Come on, ****kitty****," I sighed, turning to retreat back inside, arms folded behind my head casually.

Considering I was staying behind with Souji, I only prayed that it would go well.

:::::::::oOo:::::::::

My hand paused short of opening the door with a fresh batch of tea when I heard her voice from inside the room.

"â€¦|I'm only here to thank you for that incident the other day."

"Then shouldn't this visit be given to ****Kawa****? She was the one who jumped in first."

A soft laugh, "that****_worthless whore_****?_ Please; she isn't worth thankingâ€¦| Oh, I seem to have said too much. I forgot that you're delusional as well as madly in love with such a weak human woman like her."

"Just tell me why you're here so I won't hafta kill ya, Nagumo Kaoru." He growled stiffly.

A shuffling of robes sounded, as if she was reaching inside her _kosode_ for something.

He sounded stony, "why would you have this?"

"Kodou-san gave it to me."

I widened my eyes alertly; I reached inside my _kosode_ for my concealed knife I kept inside the folds, gripping it in my left hand...

>That damn bitch.

"â€¦|What's your relationship with him?"

She sounded serene, "he's my father. And Chizuru isâ€¦| my twin sister."

I knew it.

"My family was destroyed because we declined an invitation to overthrow the Shogunate. So Chizuru went with Kodou-san, while I was raised by the Nagumo family in the Tosa Clan. We have been separated since then." There was a strong sound of bitterness in her voice that automatically pissed me off.

"Then you're also an _oni_." It wasn't so much a question as it was a statement.

She giggled softly, "Yes; you seem rather calm about it, Okita-san."

Now she was really begging me to stab her in the throatâ€¦ Maybe I should go there, first. Or her forehead. Nah, throat was better: at least I could see the damage I'd do to her weak little form.

"Chizuru has told me about your illness." Lying bitch. "If you take the Ochimizu, your body and all that has deteriorated would heal."

Yep, definitely the throat.

He sounded surprised before he quickly masked it with that usual cockiness of his, "That girl would never tell anyone about my condition. I promised her I'd kill her if she told a soul."

She sounded taunting, "In that state, can you still fight?"

The door slid open wide as he began to unsheathe his katana. "Even if **he** can't, **I** can", **bitch**__." I flicked my wrist that held the knife, sending it flying at her throat.

Her sneering face smirked at me before her image faded from sight, the knife sailing out into the darkness she'd disappeared to.

"Damn, I missed," I growled, seeing her smirk darkly at both Souji and I before she threw my knife into the room and closed the door, fading into the night. "If I see her again, her head is mine." I vowed coldly, moving into the room to gather my knife, stowing it back inside my kosode; I looked at him as I noticed that he was quiet. "Souji."

Moonlight bounced off the glass vial of Ochimizu on the floor near him; I glared at the vial as if it were the plague, kneeling next to him.

He looked up at me, his green eyes stoic and dark, making me shudder.

I fought the shudder, lifting my hand to turn his face to look at me, watching his green eyes slowly calm until they were that shade of green I loved most; I smiled softly, stroking his cheek.

His shoulders sagged, "I owe you." He muttered.

I shrugged, brushing locks of russet hair from his face, "Don't mention it. I just hate that bitch." I mused wryly.

Souji looked past me at the vial, as if it beckoned his attention; he reached to take it in his hand, looking at the liquid inside the glass container. "How did she know?" He wondered softly.

I glared at the vial, lowering his hand that held it in the palm, squeezing his wrist. "Must've caught it on the wind or something." I looked up at his green eyes. "You're not mulling over what she offered, are you?" I asked quietly, vainly hoping he was the intelligent man I knew he was and would say 'no'.

Souji paused, looking at the vial. "Not sure." He grumbled.

I opened his hand and took the vial, seeing his green eyes snap to my gray.

"Kawa," he began.

I glared sternly. "You don't need it. Youâ€¦ you and I both know what'll happen if you take it." I whispered, lowering my gaze to the whiteness of his _yukata_.

Souji quieted, lifting a hand to trace his thumb over the right sleeve of my _haori_, knowing that beneath the sleeve's covering the scar from one of our earlier encounters with the Fury puckered my skin. "I do," he replied.

I took the vial from his sight and stowed it in the folds of my _kosode_, ignoring the scowl he shot me. "So it's settled, I'm keeping it." I stated.

"Why should you be the one to keep it?" He asked.

I scowled at him, crossing my arms over my chest. "Because you were the one she presented the vial to, not me. Besides, I won't use it." I replied.

Souji looked away, grumbling between his teeth. "What the hell's the point in keeping it if you're not gonna use the damn stuff?" He demanded.

I looked at him, then at the vial as I pulled it out from my _kosode_; I shuffled to my feet, ignoring the curious and confused stare he sent me, sliding the door open to the courtyard.

I looked down at the red potion inside the glass vial and saw her sneering smirk; I clenched my teeth and thrust my left arm out, throwing the vial out into the courtyard.

A hollow '_clink_' sounded when the glass shattered, making direct hit with a rock.

"Kawa, what the hell? Was that even necessary?" He demanded sharply once I returned inside the room and closed the door behind me.

"I thought it was." I sniffed.

Souji glared at me, deliberating between scolding me or shaking my shoulders.

"I did it for your own good. You don't need it, Souji." I declared.

He glared past me at the door, "so what're we going to do if this gets worse?" He asked tersely.

I paused and thought for a moment, ignoring the wince at the mention of his condition getting worse than it already was.

_'Then you're also an _oni_.'_

_ 'Yes; you seem rather calm about it, Okita-san.' _

A lightbulb went on.

_ That's it! _

"... Chizuru's an _oni_."

He blinked in confusion. "What about it?"

I looked at him, feeling my smile falter as I thought of what I was going to do; I looked down again. "Her blood could cure your tuberculosis."

His green eyes widened at the notion; he cut his gaze to the side curtly, closing his eyes. "Kawa, I couldn't live with having her shed blood for my own needâ€¦" He began.

"It's not just you! Everyone's worried about you: Toshi, Kondou-san, the boys, Chizuruâ€¦ none of us want to see you die, Souji. Iâ€¦ I don't want to watch you die. Not if I can do something about it, leastways." I trailed off and looked at the design on the thicker blankets.

Souji looked down, gritting his teeth. "I don't want to hurt her: I don't feel the same way about her that I do for you, but I still don't want her to get hurt because of my damn selfishness."

I looked at him and then noticed his hands were shaking a little; I placed one of my hands over his right hand, watching his green eyes look up at me from beneath his lashes. "It's not like I want to hurt her, either. But _oni_, they regenerate easily from cuts and minor ailments. Even if I ask her to cut her arm, the wound will heal fast! Souji, please. I don't want to watch you sufferâ€¦ I can't bear it. And I won't let you act stupid and get yourself killed." I begged, feeling tears start to well in my eyes.

He closed his eyes and groaned, his hand shaking again. "I'm not going to do this for my selfish heart; I'm doing it for you, Kondou-san, Chizuru and the others." He leaned forward, his forehead touching mine. "Just please don't cry anymoreâ€¦ I hate seeing you cry." He breathed.

I closed my eyes and nodded, pulling him into my arms and wrapping my arms around his neck, feeling him squeeze tight.

Souji buried his face into my neck, pulling me into his lap and clinging to me as if I was the last thing in the world he could hold on to.

I'm sorry, Chizuruâ€¦ I hope you can forgive me.

* * *

><p>AN: _ again, i apologize for lack of update. i just got so busy with writing my InuYasha fic, We Are, that i dropped this one for a bit. but i intend to make this fic epic in the future so i'll make up for not updating sooner! ^^_

_on another note, this is another of the twists in the fic i mentioned. Souji didn't take the Ochimizu because Kawa threw the vial away and broke it, purposefully, to tell him that he didn't need it, that the Ochimizu would make his life shorter than it already is because of his TB. on another note, Kawa intends to beg Chizuru to save Souji's life.. will she do it? and what will happen to Souji if he takes her blood? _
>look forward to that in the next chap!

**Kisuke**: look, Porcelain-san requests that you **review please. thanks**! ^^

10. Anthem of the Underdogs

A/N:_ where we last left off, Souji had declined taking the Ochimizu and Kawa deemed to ask Chizuru to help him.. to save him from his illness. will she say yes? and will it work? enjoy!_

disclaimer: _i don't own Hakuouki; Kawa belongs to me._

* * *

><p>Chapter Ten: Anthem of the Underdogs**

"We Fury have a very normal appetite for blood."

I put down the tray of tea, scowling. "Sannan-san, knock it off. Scare the girl anymore and you're going to be dealing with me instead of my brother." I declared stonily, making both him and the girl look at me to see me on my way to bring Souji some tea.

Sannan-san quieted reluctantly and pushed his glasses up the bridge of his nose gingerly, hazel eyes looking away. "This is a matter that does not concern mere humans, Yasakawa-kun. Keep that in mind." He returned.

My fingers lowered to the hilt of my _katana_. "It would also be wise for **_you_** to keep in mind that even though you're a bloodsucking leech now, I can still kill you as a woman of the Shinsengumi... Though don't tempt me." I bristled, glaring at his hazel stare that narrowed at my threat.

He huffed, flashing that calm smile of his, "That I will keep in mind, She-wolf of Mibu." He replied, feigning respect.

I kept my glare on him, looking past him at the girl. "Chizuru, may I speak with you in a little while? I need to ask you something." I asked, my tone softening.

She nodded, glancing between Sannan-san and myself. "Yeah," she said.

I nodded back, smiling at her before I lifted the tray and shuffled down the porch to the room.

::::::::oOo::::::::

She looked surprised before her brown eyes softened and she looked down.

I looked down at my clenched hands, seeing they shook a little with anticipation; I lifted my gaze to her bowed head. "I don't deserve to treat you this way. I know you trust me, as much as I trust you. But I also know that you don't want Souji to sufferâ€¦ just like I don't want to see him die." I bowed low before her, my forehead touching the tatami. "Please, Yukimura Chizuru, please give Souji your blood. Save himâ€¦ if not for my sake, for Toshi's, and Kondou-san's, and the boysâ€¦" I trailed off as I felt her small hand clasp over my left, surprising me.

"Kawa-chan," she began softly; I looked up to meet her brown eyes and saw that there were tears standing in her doe-eyed gaze, making me wince. She forced a smile, sniffing. "I'll do it. For your sakeâ€¦ and Okita-san's." She nodded as I straightened my posture.

I felt the tears stand in my eyes before I pulled her into a tight hug, feeling her slightly stiffen before she embraced me and hugged my back. "Thank you, Chizuru. I'm glad to have such a good friend like you," I croaked.

She seemed to smile, holding onto me before we pulled apart. "You're welcome, Kawa-chanâ€¦ To be honest, I feel honored to help Okita-san, and you. Both you two and Hijikata-san and everyone here has taken me in and made me feel like I have a familyâ€¦ I now know what it means to fight for your family." She admitted, wiping the tears from her eyes.

I chuckled and also wiped the tears from my eyes, smiling at her. "Of course you've got a family, dummy. And we're gonna stay a family, no matter what." I stated firmly.

Chizuru nodded again, laughing softly. "No matter what." She amended.

* * *

><p>He sniffed, "don't presume too much, or I really
will kill you." He warned.

I rolled my eyes and pulled his cheek, making him make a noise of annoyance and playfulness, "she's just payin' ya a compliment, Souji. No need to get homicidal," I scolded gently, making Chizuru laugh.

He pouted, removing my hand from his face and squeezing it. "Geez, you two hang out too much, you're startin' to become as forceful as Chizuru-chan," he remarked, smirking at me.

I looked at my friend and we both laughed softly, smirking at him. "I'm glad to see you're your usual self, then, **kitty**." I teased.

Souji's eye twitched before he yanked on my hand to pull me to his chest, making me squeak. "Yer just as impossible as ever, babe," he sighed.

Chizuru seemed to blush out of reverence as I pulled out of his lap, blushing.

I smacked the back of his head chidingly, making him recoil and lower his head. "Piss off, cat-face." I sniffed.

"I suppose I'll leave you two, then," she smiled at me and nodded, shuffling to her feet before opening the door and sliding it shut behind her leave as she took off down the porch.

He rubbed his head gingerly, "geez that hurt. Didn't ya ever learn not to hit a sick person?"

I sighed, "nope, and just because you're always hacking a kidney doesn't mean you're not your same overbearing, lecherous idiot self." I folded my arms in the sleeves of my haori.

Souji pouted up at me, making me giggle; he sighed and then smiled gently, removing his hand from his head to take my chin gently. "So what if I'm guilty of all those things? I love you for your faults too," he mused.

I blushed and smiled gently, leaning forward to kiss him.

He pulled me closer, guiding me into his lap, kissing me eagerly. "Reckless princess, comin' this close to me," he mused softly.

I folded my arms behind his neck, arching my back as I met his green eyes. "Like I care about that," I remarked, pressing my lips to his again.

Souji dragged his fingers down my right thigh, letting me let his hair down, "there's my girl," he chuckled, gently sliding the haori from my shoulders as he pulled away from my lips to kiss my neck slowly, his free hand curling in my hair and craning my neck to be bared.

Well, at least he was feeling better today.

:::::oOo:::::

Shimada Kai bowed his head in shame, "I'm very sorry; I failed to protect the Commander."

I frowned softly, "it's not your fault, Shimada-san, don't blame yourself." I assured, patting his shoulder.

Toshi shook his head, "No, Kondou-san said that the men were busy defending the headquarters and he declined an escort." He declared. "It's my mistake to not have convinced him otherwise."

"Nii-san," I looked over at the injured commander and sighed quietly, shuffling to my feet. "I'm going to check on Souji." I declared softly, patting Shimada-san on the shoulder a second time before I went to the door and slid it open, stepping out into the quiet night.

It was eerily quiet, not counting the fog that clogged the night air and reminded me that winter was close; I pulled the haori closer to my chest and sighed, folding my arms in the sleeves as I started to head back to the room.

"Kawa-chan," I looked over my shoulder to see Chizuru had slipped out of the room, smiling slightly at me; I nodded, smiling at her, beckoning she come to my side, before we both walked into the darkness.

Those Satcho dogs—they were nothing but cowards, attempting to assassinate Kondou-san from the shadows. They would pay with their lives for trying to kill Kondou-san!

The sound of someone stumbling into the room perked my ears as I rounded the corner; I widened my eyes slightly as I saw that the door was left ajar to the night.

"Souji!" I hurried forward, Chizuru at my heels, skidding to a halt at seeing him on the futon, reaching for his katana; I went to his side quickly, helping him up. "Souji," I looked at him worriedly, seeing a look of anger and pain on his face, making him look much older than his age.

"Kawa, I've gotta go after those bastards—the ones that hurt Kondou-san! I have to fight," Souji declared, gritting his teeth as he stared at me.

I nodded, looking over my shoulder at the darkness outside, looking at Chizuru's worried brown eyes. "Chizuru," I beckoned softly.

His green eyes flew to her before he looked away, feeling guilty. "Chizuru-chan, you don't have to help—" He began.

"It's alright, I want to help. Kawa-chan and I talked, the other day, and I told her I would do this to help you, Okita-san." She replied, moving forward and kneeling next to him; I pulled my knife out, handing it to her.

Souji took my hand and squeezed it, fighting a cough; I rubbed his back gently, watching her cut the side of her left wrist, blood seeping out from the cut, before she lifted her wrist to his mouth.

He hesitated, looking at the crimson on her wrist, before he gently took her wrist and started to take the blood.

She shuddered slightly, keeping her eyes turned away, before she pulled her wrist away gently, watching the wound regenerate until the skin looked as if it didn't get cut at all.

I looked at Souji, seeing him shake his head softly before he looked up, meeting my gray eyes. "Souji, are you okay?" I asked softly, stroking his cheek.

The color that had left his face was back, making him look like he once did before Kazama had hurt him three years ago, his green eyes taking on that familiar shine I remember they once held that now felt as if I hadn't seen it in years.

A soft smile formed on his lips, "never better." He said.

I felt tears well in my eyes before I beamed, laughing, "Chizuru you did it! It worked!" I declared, smiling at her.

Chizuru wiped the tears from her eyes, laughing with me, "I'm so glad, Okita-san!" She declared, hugging him.

Souji blinked before he smiled slightly and hugged back, letting her go. "Thanks a lot, Chizuru-chan. I can't thank you enough for helping me, for making Kawa happy." He smiled, tousling her brown hair.

I took the knife back, stowing it in my _kosode_, watching her smile and straighten. "I'd better get back to helping Yamazaki-san, before the others wonder where I went to," she declared, turning to leave.

"Chizuru," I declared; she looked at me innocently. I nodded, smiling gently at her. "Thank you, reallyâ€¦ for everything."

She smiled lightly, nodding again. "You're welcome; I'm glad too, Kawa-chan." She slid open the door, closing it behind her leave and shuffling back down the porch.

"Honestly, how do you feel? Your color is back, I meanâ€¦ You look like your old self." I asked him, perking his ears.

Souji pulled me forward, kissing me and taking me by surprise; I shivered and folded my arms around his neck, closing my eyes before he released my lips to bump his forehead against mine. "You tell me," he smirked warmly.

I smiled and stroked his left cheek, glad to see he was his old self, the Souji I first fell forâ€¦ The Souji I loved more than anything.

He was mine, and he was back.

* * *

><p>AN: _i know this is NOT what happened in the anime, but this is my story and this is how i wanted it to go. nuff said._

**Chizuru**: **please review** Porcelain-chan's fic! thanks! ^^_
/bows_

11. Hand Grenade in a Twister

A/N: _where we last left off, Souji had not taken the Ochimizu, instead taking blood from Chizuru, the oni blood healing him of his TB. now the battle is about to surmount, centering on the battle of Toba-Fushimi... will the gang rise above it? or will they fall back? enjoy the chap!_

****disclaimer****: i don't own Hakuouki; Kawa and Kisuke belong to me.

* * *

><p>Chapter Eleven: Hand Grenade in a Twister_

Those damn cannons sounded like they were getting closer.

As ordered by my brother, I was to stay behind with Chizuru and treat the wounded that came back.
>I glared at the gray sky past the gates, feeling a breeze tug at my hair I kept in a high ponytail.<p>

Boys, don't die out there, whatever you do.

"Kawa," I looked up alertly to see my brother returned with an injured soldier over his shoulder; I hurried to help him, supporting the man's other shoulder. "Nii-san, where are the boys?" I asked, looking up at his violet eyes.

"They're still out there; Yamazaki, look after this one." Toshi replied, handing off the injured man to Yamazaki-san.

"_Hai_," he replied, ushering the man inside to be treated for his injuries.

"Your cat still has his nine lives." He added calmly after I helped the man to Yamazaki-san, perking my ears.

I looked at his violet eyes to see they were pleased and I nodded, smiling in relief. "I'm glad to hear that," I looked at the scratch on his right wrist and exhaled, moving to his side. "But ****you**** sadly don't have the same luck, at least for minor injuries." I replied patiently, pulling my handkerchief from my haori sleeves and ripping a strip off, taking his hand and wrapping the strip of cloth around the injury.

Toshi grimaced at the tightness the cloth had on his forearm, scowling, "Don't patronize me," he grated.

I chuckled and finished tying the cloth, smiling up at him. "I'm your sister, it's second nature by now." I said, donning a cat-like smile.

"Your impersonation is pretty good, babe." A voice declared, perking my ears as I looked past my brother to see the first squad captain having returned with Sano, Saitou and Kisuke at his side, Sano carrying an injured man on his shoulder.

"Souji," I beamed, seeing him wink back, before I looked at the trio and frowned softly. "What happened?" I asked quietly, moving closer to the quartet.

Souji pulled me into his arms, squeezing me protectively, kissing my forehead.

"_Fukuchou_, I'm very sorry. The cannon fire overwhelmed us: we couldn't break into the temple." Saitou spoke up, looking down in shame at his failure.

>"The damn Satcho bastards tried to blow us to bits," Kisuke chimed bitterly, patting his friend on the shoulder.<p>

Sano looked at us alertly as if he remembered something, "Shinpachi hasn't Shinpachi returned?"

"No," Toshi replied, seeing him drop his gaze as if in regret.

.....oOo.....

"The weapons the Satsuma forces are using have incredible range; their bullets can hit their target even from a great distance."

"Because of this, they were able to fire upon us from height."

"How could thisâ€¦ then Nagakura-san and Shimada-san areâ€¦?" She began worriedly.

The room quieted.

"Oi, we're back!" A voice declared; we all looked up to see the aforementioned men returned from the battlefield, Shinpachi leaning against the doorway with Shimada at his back.

"Shinpatsu, Shimada-san!" I beamed in relief.

"Shinpachi!" Sano and Kisuke chirped in shock.

Shinpachi chuckled, "what's that for? I'm not a ghost yet! I have legs!" He jibed, shuffling inside the room with Shimada at his side before both men sat down at the entrance to the room.

Souji chuckled, "well Miss Worry-wart here was worried she'd hafta prepare your funerals!" He joked, elbowing me.

I elbowed back and blushed, huffing, "can it, cat-boy." I grated, smiling still in relief at seeing we were back together again.

"Damnâ€¦ the enemy's guns and cannons were goin' off all around us. It's impossible to breach their perimeter." Shinpachi exhaled, his shoulders slumping. "Andâ€¦" his hands balled into fists. "I almost lost all my men in the fight." He growled the last bit.

Chizuru and I looked at him concernedly.

Another explosion went off, shaking the foundation; Souji pulled me closer to his side out of habit as I winced at the closeness, a curse between his teeth.

>"The battle's getting closer." Shinpachi noted grimly.<p>

Inoue-san looked to my brother as substitute-commander, "Toshi-san."

Toshi looked down at the katana next to his right side, holding onto the scabbard tightly; I perked up as I noted blood was starting to seep past the temporary bandage on the cut to his wrist.
>"Has the age of fighting with swords and spears come to an end?" He wondered; Souji, Kisuke, and Saitou tensed at the ludicrous reality.
"We're retreating."<p>

He stomped the bottom of the scabbard onto the floor. "But we've not been defeated... this debt will be repaid." He vowed solemnly.

We all shared a curt nod.

"When night falls, send out the Fury Corps to clear a path. And one of us will need to go seek reinforcements from Yodo Castle." Toshi ordered.

"I'll go." Chizuru piped up.

We looked at her alertly. "Chizuru," I began.
>"You?" Toshi lifted a brow.<p>

"Everyone's worn out, so please rest up before nightfall. If it's messenger duty, I'll go; please let me do what I can!" She requested, looking at each of us gathered in the room.

I nodded, "I'll go with her, Toshi."

"No." He shot me a look as I felt Souji's arm on my waist stiffen. "It'd be suicide sending the both of you out there."

"But brother," I began to argue.

"I'll go as well." Inoue-san offered, perking my ears; Toshi, Chizuru and I looked at him in surprise.

"Inoue-san?" Chizuru wondered, seeing him smile lightly at her.

Toshi nodded, "I understand: I'm counting on you."

As soon as they left I turned to him, looking at his wrist again; I sighed. "Souji, can I see your handkerchief?" I asked, offering my hand for his spare handkerchief.

Souji handed it to me, watching me undress Toshi's bloodied bandages before I placed the new strip of cloth on his wrist. He smirked calmly, "Geez, I figured ya were a good nurse, but not this forceful, Kawa." He teased with a chuckle.

I blushed and smirked at him, looking at my brother. "You've got one point; we **are** going to come back from this. But I want to know why you didn't let me go with Chizuru." I mused, looking at his violet eyes.

Toshi's gaze hardened as I distinctly felt Souji's gaze also harden at my back. "Our father entrusted me to protect you: it was his last wish, remember? I don't know what I'd do if I lost you." He saw my slightly surprised stare and his eyes softened, the scowl fading to be replaced with a smirk. "Besides, Souji would kill me if anything happened to you." He added thoughtfully.

Souji huffed and crossed his arms over his chest, "yer damn right I would. I didn't do what I did just to watch the woman I love die in front of me." He stated, his green eyes hardening again.

I smiled softly, handing him his handkerchief back, kissing him sweetly. "Such a gentleman," I sighed.

He smirked gently, stroking my hair. "Shut up," he quipped, making me giggle.

"I never thought I'd say this, but you two actually go together." Toshi mused, making us both look to see he was watching with calm

violet eyes, an expression on his face that reminded me he was my brother despite us only being blood through our father.

Souji huffed again and held me tight, smiling his cat smile. "I might just cry with that compliment, Hijikata-san," he teased.

"Don't get too excited, dumbass," Toshi deadpanned.

I smiled at the two of them, shaking my head a little.
>If I didn't know any better, I would swear that they were actually brothers.<p>

* * *

><p>"Nii-san?" I knocked on his door.<p>

He looked up from having fixed his things, violet eyes holding something I could only assume was bitterness. "Kawa," he greeted, bidding I enter the room. "Where's Souji?" He asked as I sat next to him.

I smiled wryly, "he's sleeping, the poor thing; Iâ€| I just came to check up on you." I replied, rubbing my arm.

Toshi smirked a little at me, "you should be sleeping as well, cat-lover." He chided.

I nodded, "I know, but I was worried about you. Things have gone to hell, back at the capital and then in Osakaâ€| I'm sorry." I laughed weakly, "Guess we've had a bad week."

He quieted and then smirked again, sighing. "Or just bad luck in general." His violet eyes looked sad again as they had when we'd buried Inoue-san, and then Yamazaki earlier tonight. "I'm sorry to have brought you through all this. You never deserved to live like this, so close to death."

He lowered his gaze and his hands balled into light fists.

I placed a hand on his left fist, meeting his violet eyes.
>"Don't beat yourself up over this, Toshi. Noone expects to go to war, nowadays, but it just happens whether they expect it or not. And to be honest, I couldn't wish for a better life." I smiled for him when I saw his confused expression. "Living with you has given me something to fight for, a family I never really hadâ€| and someone to love."<p>

Toshi lowered his gaze and huffed softly. "I will admit that even though I never would've wanted my little sister to wield a sword and be just as brash as a man, I'm glad you're with usâ€| with me. And Souji." He relented quietly.

I smiled again and nodded, squeezing his wrist gently. "I'm glad too, nii-san." I shuffled to my feet, yawning and stretching my arms.

"Though don't expect me to turn tail anytime soon: I'm gonna stay with you guys for as long as I can, because I have something I want to fight forâ€| Souji included." I added as I walked to the door, feeling sleep calling me at last.

Toshi chuckled and smirked when I looked back at him, "I didn't expect you to. Go to sleep, cat-lover. You'll need it for all the fighting we're going to do in Edo." He advised, his violet eyes gentle and determined.

I chuckled and nodded again. "You got it, _Oni-Fukuchou_." I replied, exiting the room and retreating to my own room.

He roused when I slipped inside, blinking his green eyes sleepily. "Where'd you run off to?" He wondered, letting me shuffle back into bed, holding me in his arms as I snuggled into his body, holding onto him.

I smiled sleepily, "just talked with Toshi, checked up on him." I replied, kissing his nose before I rested my cheek on his chest.

He nodded and ran his fingers along my thigh lazily, nuzzling into my neck, "Didn't brain him for takin' the Ochimizu, didja?" He yawned.

I shook my head, interlacing my leg with his thigh, "No, I'll do it when we get to Edo. He's still recouping from earlier." I said quietly.

Souji nodded again, kissing the spot between my neck and left shoulder tenderly, "sleep, princess."
>I nodded back, yawning and hugging his waist as I drifted to a well-earned sleep.<p>

So long as I'm breathing and able to wield a sword, I will fight for my familyâ€¦ And for you, Souji.

* * *

><p>AN: not much to put except that i'll be focusing more on this fic now that i finished my IY fic. more drama and fighting to be going on in the future so look forward to that! ^^

Souji: yo,** review this chap**! i'd hafta kill ya otherwise, y'know~ B'D

12. Toward Tomorrow

A/N: _and so starts the Hekketsuroku season; having been forced to flee from Kyoto and Osaka, will the gang come back stronger? or will they break like fragile china? enjoy the chap!_

disclaimer: i don't own Hakouki; Kawa and Kisuke belongs to me.

* * *

><p>Chapter Twelve: Toward Tomorrow**

I sighed.

This shirt was kind of tight on my neckâ€¦ I looked at my reflection in the tall mirror again, lifting a hand to tug at a few locks of

black hair that framed my face.

If we were to march to Kofu Castle then we were to blend in with the Western-garbed soldiers that were going to be there helping us. Or something along those lines. Either way, it was an order given by Toshi and I, being both a member of the Shinsengumi as well as his little sister, had to obey it.

A pale gray shirt that buttoned up to the throat covered my torso, a deep blue vest with two sets of silver buttons on the bottom of the vest covering the shirt; dark gray pants covered my legs, the cloth being cropped short of my shins to make way for the black boots with silver buckles on the outer side of the boot; my blue sash was tied at my waist like a belt, holding both my katana and short sword in place at my right hip; the uniform haori Toshi had given me five years ago was tied at my waist ontop of my blue sash, the pale blue of the haori contrasting with the dark gray color of my pants.

I placed my hands on my hips, scowling a little at my reflection: even though we were required to cut our hair to look more Western, I had kept mine long, tied back in a high ponytail.

The striking similarity between my brother and I was now more evident that I'd kept my hair in the same way he used to keep his. and it was kind of creepy.

A pair of arms wrapped around my hips from behind, almost making me start, before I looked up at the owner of the arms and met his green eyes, smiling warmly at the pleased grin that had formed on his lips. "Well don't you look like a badass," he teased, his voice almost a purr.

I giggled, nuzzling into his cheek. "Shut up," I scolded softly, kissing his cheek sweetly as his arms squeezed my lower belly.

Souji chuckled, kissing me tenderly before he reluctantly slipped his arms from my hips, poking his head into the mirror's view. "I don't really blame ya on not liking this Western crap, though." He muttered, tugging at a lock of brown hair that framed his handsome face.

I sighed and unbuttoned the first few buttons of the gray shirt, my shoulders slumping as I finally felt comfortable. So what if I showed cleavage?

"Remind me to kill any bastard that tries to grope yer boobs," he mumbled, perking my ears.

I smirked, helping him fix the lapels of the gold and black coat he wore, kissing him. "Play nice, kitty. Besides, just because I'm a woman don't mean I can't emasculate any letch that tries to grope me," I quipped, letting my hands wander to the green fabric of his shirt he wore under the coat.

Souji grumbled at the petname, holding my hand in his. "Why're ya callin' me that?" He wondered, almost whining.

I giggled, squeezing his hand. "Because you act like a cat," I grinned gently when he pouted, kissing him again. "And I love cats." I crooned softly against his lips.

He grinned softly at that, his arm finding the small of my back, "well this kitty loves you too, princess." He growled.

I giggled again, gently pushing on his chest as he kissed the crook of my neck, nuzzling. "Down boy," I warned.

"If you two keep showering all that romantic shit around here, I swear I'm gonna puke." A voice groaned nearby, making us both look up at the owner of the voice.

Kisuke had his hands on his sides, scowling patiently at us: a dark gray coat with silver buttons on the lapels adorned his shoulders, flashing the unbuttoned collar of his baby blue shirt beneath the coat that showed flashes of his pale chest; navy pants covered his legs, being cut short by the shin-high black boots he wore on his feet, his katana and short sword hanging at his left hip by a gray sash tied around the waist that was partially hidden by the gray coat.

I whistled lowly, "Damn, you look sharp, Kisuke-kun." I declared lightly.

He blinked before his cheeks colored a little and he huffed, cutting his gaze to the side, "Piss off, at least I wasn't making out in friggin' broad daylight like you were." He grated, scritching the back of his head (to which I also noted he'd cut his hair in the same style Saitou had, save that his hair was black and messy, and Saitou's wasâ€¦ well, less messy and raven-black).

Souji sounded pissy, "Well if ya don't like it, don't stick your nose in, Ichinose-kun." He retorted, left eye twitching in annoyance.

Kisuke's right eye twitched.

"Honestly you two," I sighed as I slipped out of Souji's arms, punching him gently and backhanding Kisuke. "Sometimes you two can act like such puppies." I folded my arms over my chest, deadpanning.

"Ow, geez that hurt!" Kisuke yelped, rubbing his head gingerly as Souji snickered.

"Western clothes use buttons instead of sashes to keep them closed, huh?" Chizuru wondered, perking my ears.

"Yeah, and they're a bigger pain to deal with than a simple sash." I chimed with a sigh, seeing her look over at me.

"Wah, Kawa-chan, you look so different! And you look pretty!" She declared as she came forward into the room.

I blinked and then laughed gently, smirking. "Thanks, Chizu-chan," I replied.

"Damn right, there; ya look gorgeous in that shirt, babe!" Souji chimed, wrapping an arm around my hips possessively.

I blushed and then giggled, pushing on his chest, "cut it out,

cat-boy." I teased, seeing him pout.

"Ichinose-kun, you look so handsome!" Chizuru declared as she inspected Kisuke's coat.

Kisuke blushed, his cheeks coloring pink, before he coughed and looked away humbly, fiddling with the buttons on the left lapel, "t-thanks, Chizuru-chan," he grumbled shyly.

I chuckled, ignoring the scowl he shot in my direction, watching her look at Saitou's clothes next, before she blushed at pointing out that he missed a few button holes, turning to see my brother; the blush seemed to stain her cheeks red as she looked at him in awe.

Toshi looked at her as he seemed to notice she was staring (and probably drooling, but I think the light was playing a trick on my eyesâ€¦), "What's wrong: am I wearing this the wrong way?" He asked confusedly.

"N-no! Um, you've cut your hair, tooâ€¦" Chizuru stammered, blushing more. "I-it really suits you."

I smiled thoughtfully at them; _me doth think love is in the air_, I thought, tapping my chin with my left index knuckle.

"Damn Kawa, you look gorgeous!" Shinpachi barked, jerking my attention away; I blinked and looked to see him, Sano and Heisuke looking at my Western garb.

I blushed, huffing and smacking Shinpachi in the chest playfully, "Piss off you three, geez! You're worse than Souji," I grated, scowling at all three of the baboons.

"That shade of gray ****does**** suit you," Saitou chimed calmly behind me, making me blush again.

Kisuke smirked and snickered quietly at seeing the blush on my face.

"Geez, all of you back off or I'll kill ya," Souji barked as he held me close, pretending to ward them off with a death glare.

"Don't get your sword in a knot, Souji; besides, it was Shinpatsu who said she looked gorgeous." Heisuke rebutted patiently.

"You were still staring at her chest, runt," Sano grumbled, making the younger captain blush.

I felt a vein twitching on my brow.

****_THWACK_****.

****_THWACK_****.

****_THWACK_****.

****OW****!" All three captains barked as they now sported a large bump on each head.

"_**Jackasses, all of you**__!_ If you keep acting like the bleeding perverts yer currently actin' like, yer _**never**_ gonna get a girl!" I scolded angrily.

Souji guffawed at the sight of the three subdued captains, a pleased grin on his lips. "That's my girl."

THWACK.

"How many times have I told you not to call me that, **Okita**?" I cracked my knuckles as he now sported a large bump on his head.

Kisuke and Saitou chuckled quietly at the sight.
>"Maybe you really have been spending too much time around Hijikata-san, Kawa," Saitou commented with a smirk.

"**Piss off**!" Toshi and I snarled in chorus.

Chizuru giggled at the scene.

* * *

><p>In the face of battle, even the soldier who is the strongest can still feel fear.<p>

Fear of losing his home, his family and friendsâ€| his life.

For women like Chizuru and I, this was no differentâ€| But we still had to be strong willed and have a tough backbone.

We had to fight for our lives, for our family that we had in the Shinsengumi, for the men we loved more than anything in the world. We had to draw our swords and fight that instinctive fear of losing everything we'd come to know, to fight the bile that would threaten to spill at the sight of so much carnage, to fight the nausea at smelling so much bloodshed...

"Since the enemy's got the jump on us, I think we should retreat." Shinpachi stated, stirring me from my thoughts.

"I agree with Shinpachi; attacking the castle is only possible if we have a stronger army than the enemy." Sano chimed.

"I'll obey the army's orders." Saitou declared quietly.

"As will I; but Shinpatsu does bring up a good point, it'd be wiser to fall back now and not regret losing the men." Kisuke agreed with a nod.

"So what are we gonna do, Kondou-san?" Souji asked.

Kondou-san looked stern, "I won't retreat." Shinpachi, Kisuke and Sano stiffened. "We'll form up here and see how the enemy responds."

"Kondou-san," I began in surprise. If this was because of that warrior's spirit, then screw it! We can't afford to lose the men; half of them already ran for the hills with their tails between their

legs the night beforeâ€¦ If we stay, we're cooked.

"This mission is being funded by the Shogunate. If we retreat now, how can we face them with pride?" Kondou-san went on.

"Are you serious about fighting the enemy with our current numbers?" Shinpachi snarled.

"Are you scared?" Kondou-san challenged, opening his brown eyes.

Shinpachi glared and then lowered his head, "youâ€¦ didn't see what happened at Toba-Fushimi: that's why you can say something like that. Do you have any idea how many men died in that battle?" He ground between his teeth.

"Nagakura-kun, do you only fight battles that you can win?" Kondou-san asked sharply, challenging him.

His blue eyes blazed anger as he tried to grab at him, Sano and Kisuke holding him back from doing so. "What'd you say!? Kondou-san, youâ€¦!" He snarled.

"Shinpatsu cut it out! **Enough**!" Kisuke barked while Sano was trying to calm him down as he was swearing up a storm.

"I'll go to Edo and request reinforcements." Toshi spoke solemnly, quieting the thoroughly-pissed Shinpachi and peace-keeping Sano and Kisuke, all three men looking at him.

"Reinforcements?" Sano asked.

"Yes; we had planned to join up with them after this. They're awaiting orders in Edo. Once the reinforcements arrive, we can begin the attack on the castle. Can't we just hold on a little longer?" Toshi explained, looking at Shinpachi's blue stare.

He huffed softly and looked away, "since you asked, I have nothing more to say."

"Kondou-san, is this okay?" He looked at him.

He nodded, "yeah."

He nodded back, straightening to leave the tent.

I frowned softly after him, sighing and looking at the boys. "Are we calm now; or do I have to beat you three into a damn coma?" I wondered, crossing my arms.

Shinpachi huffed again and smirked, ruffling my hair. "No need, sword princess, we're good now." He assured, perking my ears.

I nodded, smiling in relief. "Good."

* * *

><p>Another explosion shook the ground.<p>

"Kondou-san!" Chizuru barked as she and I hurried to his side, Souji

at our heels with Shinpachi, Kisuke and Sano following.

He looked down at one of the soldiers that had gotten the brunt of the explosion, looking at him in something akin to horror and shock.

>"Kondou-san," she skidded to a halt as he shoved the body off him, meeting his hazel eyes.<p>

I smiled in relief at seeing he was still alive, "reckless fool, that was almost as bad as something Toshi woulda done." I declared, watching Sano lift him to his feet.

"The time when battles could be won by fighting with spirit alone has passed." Sano stated sadly as another explosion shook the ground near us, making me wince.

Shinpachi frowned, "please don't send men to die in vain anymore."

"Retreat." Kondou-san shut his eyes tight as the truth of their words seemed to sink in.

"You have my gratitude, Kondou-san." Shinpachi smiled in relief. "I'll go cover the frontline's retreat." He took off.

Sano nodded, "Right; needless to say, as the tenth squad captain, I'll be the vanguard." He looked at Chizuru and Saitou. "You and Saitou-san received an important order from Hijikata-san, right? I'm counting on you." He nodded to Saitou. "Souji, Kisuke, cover my back." He declared, hurrying after Shinpachi.

Souji nodded and kissed me hard, smirking, "I'll be back for you." He promised, bumping foreheads before he turned to sprint after Sano; Kisuke nodded to me, smiling, before he rushed at Souji's heels.

Kondou-san gritted his teeth, "Saitou-kun, I'll leave the rest to you."

Saitou and I balked. "Commander, what're you going to do?" Saitou demanded curiously.

"I've spent the lives of so many of my men. How can I continue to live?" Kondou-san wondered, looking away in shame. "I've decided that this must be my burial ground." He rushed away.

"Kondou-san!" I shouted, sprinting after him.

"Please wait!" Chizuru followed quickly at my heels until we reached his side, grabbing his right sleeve and holding him back.

"Yukimura-kun; let go!" He tried to shrug her off.

I stood in front of him, extending my arms out. "Kondou-san, don't be an idiot! We didn't come this far to have you die with your pride being a damn noose! Please don't go out there!" I barked angrily, seeing his eyes widen.

"Yasakawa-kun," he began, looking as if I'd slapped him across the

face.

My eyes softened and I smiled, "I know I don't have the right to speak so callously, especially to the commander of the Shinsengumi, but what hope are you showing us by going off to get killed by cowards like the Satcho army? Souji needs you, Toshi needs you—we all need you! We can't function without a head to operate the body, right? Please, Kondou-san—if you won't do it for the rest of us that've shed blood and tears to get this far, at least do it for Souji. Please, Kondou-san." I begged, my hands balling into fists.

"Kawa-chan is right! If Kondou-san were to die here, then what will Hijikata-san—what will the Shinsengumi do? As long as Kondou-san remains safe, we can always try again: Hijikata-san said that, once. I've also been ordered to stay alive and to keep Kondou-san safe." Chizuru piped up, looking at him pleadingly.

His eyes hardened a little, "do you want me to live on in shame?" He demanded, looking from her to me.

Chizuru lowered her gaze, "to live with the responsibility is perhaps many times more painful than it is to die. Even so—no, because of that! Please live on, for the men who came because they believed in Kondou-san, and for those who died."

"Yukimura-kun—Yasakawa-kun—" He lowered his gaze. "I understand."

We both shared a look of relief.

"Let's go," Saitou declared as he rejoined us.

I nodded, looking past him at the blood-stained earth and frowning before we took off.

.....oOo.....

"**Saitou-kun**!" My short sword rammed into the skull of one of the Fury; I yanked the blade out, severing the head and kicking it away, backing into him.

"Kawa, go after Kondou-san," he barked, swinging his katana at the throat of another one, severing the head.

I rammed my foot into the jaw of a Fury, stabbing into the heart and then severing the head swiftly, blood flying. "I'm staying with you, idiot!" I snapped.

Saitou rammed his katana into the throat of a Fury that tried to get at my back, making me look over my shoulder at him, eyes slightly wide. "Regardless, you've still got a duty to Souji to protect Kondou-san." He stated, his blue eyes piercing my gray gaze.

I nodded slightly, sheathing my short sword and flicking my wrist. "Don't get yourself killed just yet, samurai." I advised, smiling at him before I sprinted away after Chizuru and Kondou-san's retreat into the woods.

The clashing of swords rang in the air behind me as I ran.

* * *

><p>AN: _not as much action in this chap, i know, mostly drama. but ah well, that's one of the categories of the series so i can't really do much about that. _

**Sano**: please **review** Porcelain-chan's fic; thanks a mil!~
;D

13. Shinjutsu no Uta

A/N: _where we last left off, the gang had decided to try and take hold of Kofu Castle, but a familiar enemy decided to make a cameo and foil the plan... yep, you guessed it: __**Furies**__. and not led by just anyone, but Kodou, the doctor-turned-traitor against the Bakufu. will Kawa reach Kondou-san and Chizuru before they run into further trouble? and where's Souji? enjoy the chap!_

disclaimer: i don't own Hakouki; Kawa and Kisuke belong to me.

_**title ref - "__**Shinjutsu no Uta**__" by __**Do As Infinity**__ (comment if you can guess which anime this ending is from~! xD i'll give you a hint: it's the anime series i just finished doing a fanfic for.)_

* * *

><p>Chapter Thirteen: Shinjutsu no Uta_

The sound of air hitting my blade hummed loudly; the boy leaped out of the way, landing lithely opposite me.

>"We've gotta stop meeting like this, Nagumo Kaoru." I declared, smirking darkly as I lowered my katana to my side.

Kaoru huffed and smirked back, "Hijikata Yasakawa, the whore of the Shinsengumi. Last time we met, I recall you tried to cut my throat open. Didn't that brute of a brother of yours teach you proper etiquette when it comes to killing your enemy?" He drawled coldly.

I gripped the hilt reflexively, gray eyes steely. "'Fraid not, but he did teach me to slaughter any bastard that got in my way. Oh, that's right!" I shifted my right foot behind me, watching him mirror me. "You're just a weak bitchâ€| and a failed _oni_." I grinned.

"Insolent whore!" Kaoru drew the _katana_ in his hands, leaping at me; I caught his strike, disengaging the blades and sending him skidding back.

I growled and flew at him, being blocked by his swift blade drawn horizontally, sparks flying when the blades screeched against each other.

"You're not bad; if you hadn't tried to kill the man I love I might just yield to your skill. But don't press your luck, bitch!" I propelled my foot into his groin, making him swear and draw back, giving me an opening; I lunged and sliced at his neck, narrowly

missing as he dodged but not without my blade scratching from the left side of his nose to his jaw.

He almost doubled over, blood dripping from between his fingers that covered the narrow cut to his face.

I panted softly, glaring at him as I bared my katana defensively, itching to rip his throat open and make him bleed for what he almost did to Souji.

"Y-you cutâ€¦! **you cut my face, you damn whore**!" Kaoru snarled, flying at me in a rage; I widened my eyes slightly as I could almost feel his oni blood kicking into overdrive as I blocked most of his fury swipes, grimacing when one or two sliced at the exposed skin on my arms, my knuckles.

He growled and caught my blade I brought up to block, bearing his weight down on me; I gritted my teeth, digging my heels into the ground before he rammed the scabbard of his katana into my gut and sent me flying back into a tree, my back hitting the bark hard.

My head was spinning as I sank down to the ground, managing to keep my hold on the hilt of my katana; I looked up past disheveled locks of black hair to see him flying at me angrily.

****_Souji!_****

A loud 'klang' rang out; my eyes widened in surprise.

Chizuru blocked his death blow, arms shaking a little, as she held up her short sword horizontally.

>"C-Chizuru," I whispered in shock.<p>

"That's enough, Kaoru-san! I've made a promise: to protect Kondou-san. Even if we are siblings, I will fight!" She shoved him back rather forcefully, short sword bared protectively as I shakily stood to my feet. "Kawa-chan, please stay back." She requested quietly; I nodded, holding tight to the hilt of my katana. "Chizuru, be careful." I replied.

She nodded. "Hai," she seemed to smile; I smiled a little in return.

He looked horrified, "Y-you will draw your sword against your brother who shares your blood?" He managed past the shock of seeing his own sister defy him.

"Please don't stand in our way, Kaoru-san." Chizuru requested, trying to talk reason with him.

Pff, this brat doesn't understand reason: all he sees is blood_, I thought in distaste.

"Do you know how long I've spent looking for you, Chizuru!? Do you know how much I love you!? But even so, youâ€¦! Youâ€¦! You would side with these humans against us demons?" His hand on the katana's hilt trembled in anger and realization and hatred: his eyes glowed red before he flew at her, their matching blades locking with Chizuru on the defense.

Kaoru gave a last shove before he sent her flying back, landing on the ground, short sword discarded.

"Chizuru!" I shouted, perking up as he stood over her, the tip of his katana pointed at her throat.

He had a pitiful sound to his voice; I peeled away from the tree to get ready and attack him. "I'll say it again, Chizuru: let's leave, together!" He pleaded.

"I won't! I've made a promise!" She breathed.

His matching brown eyes widened, "I understand; then let me let me, by my own hands!" He raised the blade high for the final blow.

"**CHIZURU**!" I sprinted forward. _Don't you dare, you little brat! __**Don't you dare cut down your own sister**__!_ I inwardly threatened, feeling my blood run cold.

Another loud 'klang' rang in the air; I widened my eyes alertly.

Souji blocked his downward strike, green eyes blazing, his katana gripped tightly in both hands.
>"O-Okita-san!" Chizuru gasped.<p>

"Souji!" I declared, smiling in relief and feeling my shoulders slump.

He shoved him back, "you sure are persistent!" He spat; his green eyes glanced at me and he looked forward, his lip curling as his eyes turned stoic and cold.

"Right back at you, Okita; I see you didn't take my offer. What a weak fool!" and it was all to satisfy the woman you love, right? **Pathetic**!" Kaoru sneered, his tone as icy as Souji's eyes.

Souji growled, "That's an insult where I come from; keep running your little shitty mouth and I'll kill you **faster**!" He flew at him.

An explosion went off in the distance as they clashed, sunlight glinting off the blades that disengaged and then locked, sparks flying on one particularly sharp lunge from Kaoru, the shorter opponent trying to bear his weight down on Souji.

He grunted and shoved him away, watching him disappear from sight, slightly surprising him.

I sprinted forward when I noticed the air begin to hum at his back right where his heart was. "***SOUJI**!"

Blood flew in the air; a severed arm flew off.
>His green eyes widened alertly.<p>

Kaoru cried out in agony as blood spilled freely onto the ground where his left arm had been, the discarded limb lying on the ground yards away.

My _katana_ dripped blood from the decapitation; I flicked my wrist, glowering into his rage-filled brown eyes. "Looks like I didn't **miss** this time around." I mused softly.

"Kawa," Souji began in awe behind me at seeing the damage I'd done to the little shit that had tried to kill him and me.

He looked at the hole where his left arm was, looking at me and his frame shook as he gripped the katana's hilt. "_You_â€¦| **_you_ atrocious bitch_**!_" He snarled as he lunged at me.

A _katana_ stabbed into his heart from behind, stilling life around the wood.

Souji and I widened our eyes alertly; Chizuru looked on in surprise.

"Kazama." I whispered, lowering my _katana_.

Kaoru twitched, cutting his gaze to the side to glare up at his assassin. "K-Kazama Chikageâ€¦!" He rasped.

"Forgetting an _oni_'s honor and dirtying the Yukimura name is unforgiveable." He yanked the blade out of his chest cavity, letting him fall face-forward.

Souji pulled me to his chest protectively, _katana_ held tight. "What brought **you** here?" He demanded coldly.

I looked at Kaoru as he tried to beg Chizuru, to ask her something, before he breathed no more; I glared up at Kazama.

"I suppose you've heard: Kodou has left the Satsuma Clan and betrayed demonkind. We'll have to kill him." Kazama directed his words at Chizuru, briefly sparing me a look, before he turned and walked away down the path.

My shoulders slumped; I closed my eyes and leaned limply into Souji's chest, feeling him hold me tightly as he buried his face into my hair, fingers digging into my scalp. "Souji," I breathed, relieved once more that he had come.

Souji kissed my neck, sighing. "You reckless princess, you scared the shit out of meâ€¦| But I've never been prouder." He whispered, his tone low, as his hands dug into the small of my back and the back of my head.

I smiled and held his cheek, meeting his darkened green eyes. "I'll fill you in later, I'm just glad you came when you did. Thank you." I replied softly.

He flashed his cat-smile I loved, green eyes warm. "Y'know I'd do anythin' for you, princess." He remarked gently.

I chuckled, looking up as Chizuru walked past us. "Chizu-chan," I began.

Chizuru looked at us and smiled lightly, "I'll be right back, honest!" She hurried after Kazama's wake.

Souji rolled his eyes and sighed, "She has weird taste in men." He muttered, leaving me to help Kondou-san up. "Kondou-san, you alright?" He asked.

Kondou-san took his helpful hand gratefully, smiling at him. "Never better; Yasakawa-kun that was some fight! It's a wonder you're strong enough to fight against a pure-bred oni like that kid!" His voice trailed off as he looked at the felled form of Kaoru.

I blinked and then laughed weakly, rubbing my neck. "It wasn't much, Kondou-san! To be honest, I was startin' to feel a bit rusty, considering I haven't done much fighting lately!" But I'm just glad we're all alright." I assured, quieting and smiling in relief.

Souji and Kondou-san shared a look before they chuckled quietly; I sweatdropped, smiling at them.

"**_So_**, I'm all for **_burnin_** his body," Souji sighed, indicating Kaoru.

Kondou-san shook his head, clapping a hand on his shoulder. "We'll bury him; it's only right that we do." He stated, sending him a scolding look that reminded me just how close he and Souji were, looking at the boy.

I sheathed my katana, smiling gently at Souji's pouty face. "Be nice for once, kitty." I teased softly.

Souji huffed, looking away, a light blush staining his cheeks.

I giggled.

* * *

><p>"Oi, what about me?" Heisuke griped.<p>

"Yer too young, love; 'sides, we earned it! We busted our asses enough for a break." I barked lightly, looking up at him with one open gray eye as I rested my head in Souji's lap.

Kisuke rolled his eyes, poking my arm with a toe as he picked up the bottle from the tray next to me and poured himself another shot. "Sounds like ya've already had too much, Kawa-chan," he grumbled before sipping the cup.

I tossed my boot at him, pouting. "Piss off, Kisuke-kun." I grated.

Souji snickered, catching the boot thrown back after hitting him in the backside. "Cute," he teased.

I looked up at his soft green eyes and blushed, huffing as I looked away. "Cat-face," I grumbled, ignoring the pleased chuckle that came from him.

He sighed, running a hand through my hair. "Y'know, considering you can hold your liquor better than yer brother, sometimes ya can be a pissy drunk." He mused aloud.

I huffed.

"So Kondou-san's not here today again, huh?" Heisuke guessed quietly, stirring our attention back to the room.

Sano shrugged, looking away, "as the commander, he has to discuss future plans with the big-wigs. There're so many things has to do, including recruiting new men." He mused.

"Simply recruiting won't solve the problem." Shinpachi muttered. "If the men are just sent out to die, then what's the point; neh, Saitou?" He looked at his friend.

"Leave him outta this, Shinpatsu." Kisuke chided quietly, slouching against the doorway next to said captain.

I sat up, looking down at the bandages covering my arms and smiling a little, running a hand through my hair.

"There's nothing we can do, though; that was the first time Kondou-san commanded a battle against the new government forces. We can't expect everything to be perfect right from the start." Sano stated calmly, trying to be the peacemaker again.

"Sano's right. We also can't blame him for what happened, either; just because he's the commander doesn't mean he's God. We can't control how many lives are saved or lost in a battle, on either side." I declared softly, looking at the bandages covering the knuckles of my right hand, lightly curling it into a fist at the memory of the fight against Kaoru.

Kisuke sipped his sake again, "well excuse me for not goin' to the same philosophy school you went to, Kawa-chan." He sniffed in mock dramatics.

I blinked, huffing and smirking at him. "Shut up," I scolded, perking up as Souji brushed hair from my cheek, my eyes softening at his touch.

"I think it's because she's been livin' so damn close to Hijikata-san for so long, neh, Sano?" Shinpachi chimed, smirking playfully at me.

I pouted.

Sano chuckled, "nah, our sword princess has always had a good head on her shoulders. Of course that still hasn't changed how Souji is." He winked at me, smirking like Shinpachi.

I blushed slightly, huffing and looking away, crossing my arms at my chest. "Piss off, overgrown lummoX," I grumbled.

I hated it when they ganged up on me.

Souji chuckled, tousling my hair before exhaling, "C'mon, I think the baboons have had too much for tonight." He grumbled, shuffling to his feet and then lifting me up by the hand, leading me out of the room.

"Oi, don't hate just because yer off to do what we know you two are gonna do!" Shinpachi called.

"Piss off, Shinpachi!" Souji laughed, ushering me down the porch to our room.

I shook my head once we were far enough away from the room, sighing and folding my arms behind my head. "Souji," I began, perking his ears.

"Hm?" He opened a green eye at me.

I looked at the sunset, smiling softly, "let's get out for a little while." I asked.

Souji opened both eyes, smirking softly. "Right," he nodded.

:::::::::oOo:::::::::

The streets were still crowded, reminding me of how they were back in Kyoto, as we moved with the current.

I know we gained odd looks from passerbys due to our Western clothing, but I didn't care. And I doubt Souji cared much, either; he was never one to care what people thought.

"What possessed you to wanna walk around here? There's not much to see."

"I wanted to show you the dojo I went to, when I was little."

"Ah."

"Hm?"

"I can just picture a tinier version of you wiping the floor with boys' faces."

"Shut up. At least I got stronger doing it."

"I know; otherwise you wouldn't have owned my ass in that spar a while back."

We passed by old alleys I remember wandering around in my childhood, finally coming to a halt several yards away from an old temple.

He tilted his head to one side to read the sign of the dojo that was hanging off the high gate. "'Reishin Dojo: Co-eds Welcome_'. " He read aloud, quirking a brow. "It kinda looks like Sheikan Dojo, to be honest. Although Sheikan didn't look this shabby."

I shrugged, smiling at him. "Katsumoto-sensei kept it spotless when he was living; and if anyone got in trouble during a match or was disqualified for bein' an idiot, he'd make them help clean on the off days." I smiled softly at the memories of sparring inside the main hall, almost hearing the different noises of boys crying and then swearing at me, exclamations of pain or battle cries. "He was a good teacher; he never doubted my skill, even though I was just a little girl." I mused softly.

Souji opened a green eye at me, tousling my hair. "Sounds kinda like how Kondou-san was, when I was a kid. I gotta admit, even though I learned the way of the sword at the age of nine, it's interesting how you learned at the age of seven." I'm kind of jealous." He admitted, perking my ears.

I looked at him in slight surprise before I smiled, taking his hand and squeezing. "Aww, a cuter version of you woulda been too adorable." I teased warmly.

He blushed, spluttering a huff and looking away. "Don't patronize me, princess, or I'll hafta kill ya." He grumbled.

I laughed softly, reaching on my tiptoes to kiss his nose, surprising him.

Souji's eyes softened and he folded his arms around my waist, kissing me tenderly.

I curled my fingers in his shortened brown hair, closing my eyes and bumping foreheads. "Let's go back." I urged softly.

He nodded and kissed my forehead, sliding his arms from my waist to favor taking my hand and walking away with me in tow; I looked over my shoulder at the remains of the dojo I had grown up in, smiling softly and looking away.

My eyes caught the sunlight shining off various trinkets in a wooden stand on the side of the street.

I pulled away from Souji to move closer to the stand, doubling a little to stare at the various little pieces of jewelry, some small and some long.

"See something you like, miss?" The salesman asked as I heard Souji come to stand next to me.

My eyes widened as I caught sight of a jade dagger pendant on a silver chain displayed to the right inside the glass box. "It's pretty," I began softly, looking up at the man as I pointed at the pendant. "How much do you want for the pendant?" I asked.

He smiled lightly, "two _ryoh_." He answered.

I fished in my pockets, blinking and then frowning as I noticed that I didn't have any money. "Damn," I muttered.

"Two _ryoh_, right?" Souji handed him the money; I looked up at him in surprise.

He winked at me as the man took the pendant out of the display box, handing it to him. "Thank you, please come again." He said with a bow of his head.

Souji nodded and pulled me away and back onto the main street by the hand, the pendant in his free hand. "Souji," I began, still surprised he had bought me jewelry... This was the first time he bought me anything, aside from food or drinks.

"Here," he stopped us, holding the pendant's silver chain open; I

bowed my head to let him slip it around my neck, adjusting the chain so the charm stood out, straightening and looking at it in awe, letting the charm drop to poke the bottom of my cleavage I flashed.

He smiled thoughtfully, nodding. "That green suits you." He declared calmly.

I blushed, smiling back and hugging him, kissing him happily. "Thanks, Souji; I love it." I thanked him, nuzzling into his neck.

Souji seemed to smile, hugging my waist. "I'm glad. It looks great on you, babe." He chuckled, reluctantly letting me go to continue our retreat back to our temporary living place, taking my right hand in his left.

I squeezed his fingers reflexively, looking down at the pendant's charm as I held it between my right thumb and index finger. "Souji," I began, perking his ears.

"Hm?" He wondered.

"When this is over, I want to live in Edo." I mused.

Souji blinked, cocking his head to one side curiously, making me giggle. "Why Edo?"

I shrugged, "it's where we were born, isn't it? And besides, we made a promise five years ago that we would be together after all this subsided." I explained, recalling that night when I'd gone looking for him and found him on the bridge overlooking the river that ran through the capital.

He quieted and then smiled, nodding. "Yeah, we'll live in Edo. Who knows? Maybe we'll start a dojo." He shrugged, squeezing my hand.

I blinked and then chuckled, smirking. "That'd be a sight, seein' you try to teach ten year olds to fight without braining them with a _shinai_." I mused lightly.

Souji sniffed, feigning hurt, placing his free arm over his eyes. "Such faithlessness in the man you love, I'm hurt Kawa-chan!" He cried dramatically.

I laughed.

Souji grinned and pulled me to his hip, wrapping his arm around my waist and squeezing affectionately.

* * *

><p>"Wait a moment! What do you mean, you want me to stop enlarging the Fury Corps!?"<p>

"It's just the way it sounds. I don't intend to create anymore Fury from here on out; just make do with what you have."

"This is unacceptable! With Harada-kun and Nagakura-kun gone, it's of the utmost importance that we strengthen our forces!"

"It's true, enlarging the Fury Corps is the quickest way to strengthen our forces..."

"Then why?"

"There's a major flaw with the Fury; I received this information from a reliable source."

"A flaw?"

"The Furies get their power from their very life force: in other words, the more they use their powers, the shorter their lives become."

My eyes widened; I looked at my brother sharply. Their life force? Then that means I shuddered and lowered my gaze. _Toshi!_

"So there you have it; it doesn't hurt to avoid using your powers unless you absolutely must."

"Then that's all the more reason for me to continue my research! Fixing that flaw will help you now that you've become a Fury."

"We can't afford to waste more lives using that damn potion. My brother took it of his own choice, not because of some lab experiment of yours, Sannan-san. Drop it." I spoke up patiently, meeting his usually-calm brown stare and holding it in a stare down.

Even though I felt pity for Sannan-san at one point in time because of his shame at being rendered practically useless, if he wanted to put my brother's life in danger he was going to have to deal with me and that was final.

"You still do not understand anything about the Fury, Yasakawa-kun!"

"I understand ****_enough_**** to know that you lost your damn sanity along with your pride when you drank that Ochimizu four years ago! I will warn you this: if you hurt my brother in one way or another for the sake of your obsession, I'll kill you. Do you understand ****_that_****, Yamanami?" I spat coldly, bristling and glaring hard at him, seeming to surprise him by referring to him by his last name instead of the nickname I'd gotten used to calling him by.

His brown eyes sharpened. "How dare you address me in that manner, you insolent!"

"****Enough****!" Toshi snarled, silencing him with a cold glare. His violet eyes were hard stones. "I'm ordering this as the Vice-Commander: ****cease all Fury experimentation****."

I quieted and said no more, bowing my head to his order respectfully.

"Now, moving on to plans for the future, Lord Yoshinobu has been locked up in Kan'ei Temple. Now that we can't fight in Edo, it'll be difficult to keep fortified here. As such, the Shinsengumi will move to Aizu." Toshi announced.

I blinked as Kisuke, Heisuke and I looked up. "'Aizu'?" I repeated softly.

"That's Lord Katamori's landâ€¦ that's just what the Shinsengumi need to kick back into gear." Heisuke smirked lightly at the prospect of finally shining before the clan that had been sponsoring us for five years; they were the reason we had remained established in Kyoto for so long... But then again, they were also the idiots who tried to take the credit for raiding Ikedaya four years ago as well.

My how the tables have turnedâ€¦

Toshi smirked as well, "the lord of Aizu isn't gonna let us go to waste. First we need to gather up the men and reorganize the troops. Souji, you're to aid Saitou with that." He instructed.

"Aww, but it's so boring!" Souji griped.

I elbowed him and giggled, "be nice and try to get along with the other children present." I teased, seeing him pout.

He sniffed and folded his arms over his chest, "fine, whatever." He grumbled in reluctant compliance.

"With all the new recruits, it's going to be tough camping with Heisuke, Sannan-san and the Fury Corps. As such, I want you to leave tomorrow and take the Utsunomiya route to Aizu." Toshi continued, flashing a smirk at Souji's pouting face, looking to Heisuke and Sannan-san.

Heisuke nodded, "sure thing."

Sannan-san closed his eyes and obeyed, "I see I don't have a choice."

"That is all." Toshi concluded the meeting.

Everyone gathered shuffled to the open door, leaving the room.

"Kawa," he beckoned, perking my ears.

I looked at Souji and nodded, smiling before I turned to my brother. "What's up?" I asked.

Toshi smiled slightly and shook his head, sighing. "You're a hell of a woman, y'know that?" He mused, earning a look from me.

I blushed a little, smirking gently. "That's what I'm here for," I shrugged.

He smirked back, lifting a hand to tousle my hair. "Thank you," he said quietly.

I lifted a brow and tilted my head to one side. "For what?"

He looked at me, his violet eyes showing the kindness he rarely showed to anyone we knew (well maybe Chizuru).

>"For speaking up when I wasn't permitted to. Although the death threat was a little uncalled for, but you got the point acrossâ€¦"

about defending my honor." He explained, lowering his gaze before it lifted again and he smiled wryly.<p>

I blushed again and shrugged, smiling at him. "Well it got the point across, right? Besides, we're family; you'd do the same for me." I replied calmly.

Toshi smirked and nodded, "damn straight." He amended firmly.

I chuckled and then walked out of the meeting room, passing by Chizuru; I winked at her, seeing her smile, before I walked down the porch with my arms folded behind my head leisurely.

Even though you're not my full-blood brother, I still feel like we're family. And I'll fight to protect that... No matter what!

* * *

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><p>AN: _whew, more action! lol there's more action coming up in the
following chap so look forward to that. not much else to put, though.
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**_Heisuke_**: yo, **review this fic**, it's kickass! thanks!  
xD
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14. New Moon, Half Moon

A/N:_ where we last left off, Kawa and Souji had put an end to Kaoru's little scheme to abduct Chizuru and restore the Yukimura Clan.. with some help from Kazama in the form of a death blow. promises were made and the noose tightens. enjoy the chap!_

*__also__, just a head's up: __episode 18 will be different in this fic__. if you lot know what i'm talking about, you now have permission to get excited and start biting your fingernails in anticipation. lol xDD anywho, onward~!

****disclaimer**:** i don't own Hakuouki; Kawa and Kisuke belong to me.

* * *

><p>Chapter Fourteen: New Moon, Half Moon...**

::::: **Flashback** :::::

'Have fun out there,' I'd wished as I'd hugged him tightly.

He'd held me close, nuzzling into my neck. 'S' not gonna be much fun if you're not there. But you need to stick around and man the fort for me.' He'd smirked at me, kissing me lovingly.

_I'd held onto his neck and kissed back, letting him cup my left cheek. 'Come back safe.' I'd requested quietly, bumping foreheads.

_Souji had nodded, planting a tender kiss on my forehead, 'I will.'

He'd whispered, kissing me again before he'd pulled away and trotted after the small group that would go train the recruits, waving absently._

I'd smiled after his leave, looking down at the green charm of the pendant he'd bought me, smiling at the sunlight that glinted off the jade charm.

::::::::::**End-o'-Flashback**:::::::::

"We brought tea," Chizuru announced as she and I trotted up the stairs leading to the loft occupied by Kondou-san, his temporary 'study', a tray of tea in my hands.

"Oh, Yukimura-kun, Yasakawa-kun; thanks as always, girls." Kondou-san greeted with his trademark kind smile.

I tilted my head to one side as I looked at the few books scattered over the desktop, looking at him. "What've you been reading, Kondou-san?" I asked.

"'_The Story of the Three Kingdoms_' and '_Kiyomasa-ki_'." They're just fairy tales." He answered, sounding almost sheepish.

I chuckled, lifting the _Kiyomasa-ki_ book and scanning the pages. "Aren't they stories of a great general or something like that?" I wondered.

"Yeah; I've read them so many times I've memorized them!" Kondou-san said sheepishly as Chizuru set the tray down and I put the book back in front of him. "Back when I was a kid, I thought, '_someday I'll be a great general like Kanseiteikun and fight for someone other than myself_'." But dreams alone don't turn you into a famous generalâ€¦ It took a bit too long for me to realize that." He lowered his gaze at the reality of his long-term dream.

I shared a look with Chizuru before frowning softly, sighing. "You're still gonna be remembered one day, though, for getting the Shinsengumi this far. For being the great Commander Kondou; I know you will." I declared gently.

Kondou-san blinked before he laughed quietly, "Your faith in people surprises me sometimes, Yasakawa-kun. It's a wonder Toshi is proud of having a sister like you; and Souji is happy to have stayed at your side for so long." He admitted, rubbing his neck.

I widened my eyes a little at this factoid, blushing shyly and laughing quietly. "Geez, now you're gonna make me cry, Kondou-san!" I teased lightly.

He looked sheepish again, "I apologize, Yasakawa-kun!" He barked, making me giggle.

I smiled and clapped a hand on his shoulder, winking. "Sorry, that's a habit I picked up from Souji." I assured gently.

Kondou-san chuckled weakly, "it figures, knowing Souji's sense of humor..."

"_Kondou-san, are you up there!?" Toshi shouted from the foot of the

stairwell before he, Shimada-san and Kisuke hurried upstairs to the loft, skidding to a halt at seeing Kondou-san, Chizuru and I present.

"Toshi, what's wrong?" Kondou-san asked.

I looked at the alarm in my brother's gaze, feeling a weight sink onto my gut; something was up and it didn't smell good.
>"Prepare to leave immediately; the enemy has us surrounded!" Toshi informed gravely.<p>

Chizuru and I perked up as Shimada-san and Kisuke looked out the window; I moved to look out the window with them, seeing a fresh batch of enemy troops circling the perimeter of our hideout. "Shit," I grumbled.
>
Definitely not good_.

"There's two or three hundred of them; Ichinose-kun and I came in through the back entrance so they wouldn't notice us." My lip curled as I noted that they were the Satcho dogs, not the Furies... it'd be easier to cut them down if they had been the latter.

"We could handle them if there weren't so many; we don't have enough time to wait for Saitou and Souji to get back." Toshi chimed grimly.

I perked up and looked at him, "Toshi, what'll we do?" I asked, my voice slightly rising by an octave in the growing panic.

"Shimada, I'll manage things here; take Chizuru, Kawa, Ichinose and Kondou-san and get outta here." Toshi instructed.

"You can't; there's too many, even for you!" Chizuru exclaimed.

"She's right, it's suicide. Besides, it's broad daylight; you can't use your powers, not right now." I agreed, scowling at him.

"We'll never know until I try," he began to leave before Shimada-san grabbed his shoulder. "Wait a moment!" He declared. "The enemy troops were carrying guns!"

Kondou-san straightened and stood up. "Toshi, there's no need for you to go." He stated, surprising us; his face looked passive and calm. "I'll go to the enemy camp."

"Kondou-san!" Kisuke balked.

Toshi looked disbelieving, "what're you talking about, Kondou-san!? You'd be going to your death!" He demanded.

Kondou-san nodded as if he understood everything, "of course I won't tell them I'm Kondou of the Shinsengumi; if I tell them we're a pacification unit sent by the Shogun's vassal, then it should buy you enough time to escape."

"They're not gonna believe you, Kondou-san; if you forfeit your life then the Shinsengumi is up shit creek!" Kisuke barked.

"He's right, don't be stupid!" Toshi chimed angrily. "They'll see

right through that!"

Kondou-san smiled, "assuming they do, I'm still a _daimyo_. It won't be easy for them to kill me."

"You're being naiive; those bastards don't give a shit about titles bestowed by the old Bakufu!" Toshi argued. "I won't die as long as they don't pierce my heart. It'd be better if I bought time!" He stated.

"Nii-san, don't! We can think of another way, you don't have to go out there! Please, Toshi," I piped up, looking at him and gripping his sleeve.

Toshi glared at me, "It'd be wiser for me to instead of you lot, Yasakawa; I made a promise to protect you and I'm not going to abandon it!" He snapped.

I widened my eyes slightly, "Toshi," I began softly.

"It's unacceptable, Toshi; no matter what you say, I'm going to draw the enemy's attention." Kondou-san stated firmly, surprising him; he lowered his gaze. "I've made up my mind, Toshi."

"Cut the crap! What'll happen when we lose our leader!? I'll see to it you escape even if I have to tie you up: your body no longer belongs to just you, Kondou Isami!" Toshi snarled.

Kondou-san looked serious and sharp, reminding us that he was indeed the Commander of the Shinsengumi. "***Then this is an order**!" He snapped, his patience lost.

Toshi balked; I widened my eyes slightly.

"Vice-Commander Hijikata, take all soldiers stationed here and join up with the Ichikawa Army!" He commanded.

His violet eyes remained widened a little, "â€|You're ordering me?" He wondered softly; he lowered his gaze as if in shame. "Whatâ€| what the hell do you think you're doing?"

"Aren't the Captain's orders absolute?" Kondou-san's face softened again, only in sadness this time. "Or are you different, having made others become Fury or disembowel themselves over this?" He asked; he looked at Shimada-san and Kisuke. "Shimada-kun, Ichinose-kun."

"**Sir**!" Both men perked up.

"Please escape together with Toshi. My staying here will be in vain if you wait until the enemy closes in." Kondou-san instructed.

Shimada-san looked at Toshi, "_Fukuchou_, let's go." He urged quietly.

Toshi looked away, his shoulders shaking a little.

Kondou-san smiled his trademark kind smile, "Toshi, let me be at peace; you've run this way and that trying to raise my fame, and you

even became a Furyâ€¦ It's painful for me to see you like this."

"Nii-san," I squeezed his wrist gently, practically feeling the anger from his body radiate to mine from just the touch, keeping my gray eyes on him and vainly praying he'd come up with some sarcastic-yet-serious remark like always did in the past, brushing it off but mulling over the situation later on when noone was around.

His hands balled into fists, "Iâ€¦ I've been making you suffer? I wanted to become a samurai and serve our country! I thought you and I would rejoice together in the end." He wondered quietly.

Kondou-san quieted and lowered his gaze, "I'm sorryâ€¦ I'm the one who's driven you down."

Toshi inhaled sharply, lifting his head. "So you ordered that as Captain, right?" He asked.

He smiled a little, nodding, "right."

"Then I have no other choice." He mused, looking at Shimada-san and Kisuke, "Shimada, Ichinose, pass this message to the soldiers still here: we have to secure an escape route." He ordered.

"Right!" Shimada-san hurried out of the room; Kisuke looked at Kondou-san and smiled tightly before he flew after him downstairs.

Toshi looked at us, "girls, wait here." He ordered.

"Got it," Chizuru nodded; I met his violet eyes and smiled weakly, nodding, watching him return the smile before he followed Kisuke and Shimada-san's leave downstairs.

I sighed and then sent a scowl out at the window to the surrounding enemy, vainly hoping Souji and Saitou would find us as soon as we fled this place.

>"Yukimura-kun, take this." I looked up to see Kondou-san give a small pouch of money to Chizuru, blinking.<p>

She looked from the pouch to his brown eyes, "what's this for?"

He smiled again, "money for you to flee; it's an expression of how I feel since I never did help you out. Please take it." He deposited it into her hands. "Now leave as soon as you can, both of you; there's still time. I'll tell Toshiâ€¦"

"We're not leaving you behind, Kondou-san!" I declared sharply, looking at him as I felt like the situation was slipping from between my fingers that I balled into fists. "I don't care if I die, I told Souji I'd stay to man the fort for him, and that includes keeping you alive until then. Don't do this, please, Kondou-san!" I cried.

Kondou-san quieted at the mention of Souji, smiling and tousling my hair gently, reminding me again of a father-figureâ€¦ or rather, the father-figure I often saw him as, in my time spent with the boys.

"What kind of man would I be for letting a brave young woman like you die in my stead?" His brown eyes softened sadly. "Yasakawa-kun, I'm glad to have met a brave and beautiful young woman like you. And all I ask is that you live, if not for myself but for Souji, and Toshi." He lowered his hand from my hair, smiling his trademark smile. "Tell Souji that I'm sorry."

I nodded, lowering my head and sniffing as I felt hot tears try to crawl down my cheeks, "***s-sir**!" I croaked.

Chizuru sounded sad again, "Kondou-san, please escape with us! Hijikata-san, Shimada-san, Ichinose-kun, and Kawa-chan want you to." She pleaded.

He shook his head, "I can't; if I say I want to escape, Toshi will turn into a Fury and risk his life fighting hundreds of soldiers. The more he uses his Fury powers, the shorter Toshi's life will become, right?"

I looked at him and wiped my eyes absently, smiling a little, "I had a feeling you were listening in, that day." I mused softly.

"I can't sacrifice him for my own survival. Don't look so sad, girls. Even I can handle drawing the enemy's attention so my friends can get away." He looked at us after looking out the window, smiling again; he turned to bow his head in plea. "Yukimura-kun, Yasakawa-kun, please take care of Toshi!" He straightened to smile his kind smile at us.

Chizuru sniffed as her eyes saddened and tears threatened to fall; I nodded, smiling weakly at him. "We will."
>
That was the last kind smile I ever saw from Kondou Isami_.

* * *

><p>"You've got horrible luck! I'm pissed off right now." Toshi growled.<p>

"Who's there!?" A voice barked in the distance, perking my ears.

We looked to see a large platoon of Satcho soldiers staring down at us from the hilltop; "hey you! What're you doing here!?" The main soldier in charge demanded, one soldier drawing his gun on the left and the soldier on right aiming his own gun at us.

Toshi glared at them, "Shimada, I'll handle things here; you and Ichinose get everyone out of enemy territory!" He ordered.
>"Right, let's go." Shimada-san urged the men, he and Kisuke sprinting away into the forest, leaving Chizuru, Toshi and myself.<p>

"Freeze; we'll shoot if you don't freeze!" The main soldier shouted.

I widened my eyes slightly when Toshi gave a battle cry and sprinted forward. "Nii-san, don't do it! **NO**!" I shouted after him.

"Don't do it, Hijikata-san; don't use your powers!" Chizuru

cried.

"Keep your mouths shut!" Toshi snarled as he flew into the fray, black hair turned white, eyes turned red.

The sound of gunshots going off made me flinch; I looked at the girl, "Chizuru, stay here." I ordered, sprinting after my brother.

"Kawa-chan, don't!" She exclaimed behind me as I drew my _katana_.

Blood flew as I rammed my _katana_'s blade into the chest of the front gunman, sending him down; I yanked the blade out swiftly, turning to the next gunman and ripping his throat open, blood flying as he fell.

"**_Fire_**!_"

"**KAWA**!"

I dodged two or three of the bullets that flew at me, wincing as one grazed my left arm, before I hurtled into the soldiers, slicing the throat open of the one who'd commanded the soldiers, ripping open the forehead of another one with my short sword I held in my right hand's grip.

A battle cry sounded at my back as another soldier flew at me; Toshi's _katana_ stabbed into his back from behind before he yanked the blade free, slightly surprising me.

I met his red eyes and nodded wordlessly, rushing forward to tear into the next soldier, blood flying in the air; another soldier flew at me with his _katana_ drawn and held overhead.

My foot rammed into his chin, cocking his head back; my short sword ripped his throat open before I scrambled away and helped Toshi tackle the rest of the soldiers.

These Satcho dipshits were the reason Kondou-san was going to die; they were the reason we were even in this damn war in the first place... _I will never forgive them for this!_

:::::::::oOo:::::::::

Blood soaked the ground after the platoon had been slain.

I panted, doubling over to stick my _katana_ in the ground and grip my knees, closing my eyes tight to fight the rush of adrenaline in my veins at fighting so many soldiers.

"Kawa," his boots came to a halt a few feet away from me; I looked up past locks of black hair that stuck to my cheek from sweat to meet his eyes to see they were still red, his hair snow white.

He extended a hand to me; I smiled slightly and took his hand, straightening to my feet. His eyes glanced at the rip in my left sleeve, frowning. "Your arm," he began.

I shook my head, smiling again. "It's not that bad." I replied, perking up when he pushed locks of black hair from my cheek gingerly.

Toshi smiled a little, tiredly, "She-Wolf of Mibu indeed." He muttered.

I nodded, thinking back to Kondou-san's kind smile and lowering my head, closing my eyes. "I'm sorry, for earlier. I should've dragged him with us, even if he wanted to sacrifice himself for our sakeâ€¦ I couldn't get him to leaveâ€¦" I felt the tears fall down my cheeks at the memory of his kind face, shutting my eyes tight.

He quieted and pulled me into a hug, holding me close and letting me cry and bury my face into his shoulder.

I heard Chizuru come forward several minutes later.

"Did Shimada and the others get away?" Toshi wondered quietly as I rubbed my nose gingerly and sniffed.

She seemed to nod, "yes, I believe so."

His shoulders shook as he held me close again, perking my ears; I quieted and held onto his shoulders gently, lowering my gaze. "I see; you should go while you can." He told her.

She moved closer to his back; "what're you doing? Get moving!" He snapped at her, his fingers digging into my shoulders.

"I'm sorry, but I can't follow those orders."

"What?"

"I won't get in your wayâ€¦ So let me stay with you."

>
Chizuru_, I thought before I smiled softly, resting my cheek against his shoulder. _Kondou-san was right; you really have become Toshi's attendant_.

"Why did I work so hard to come all this way: was it to hand over Kondou-san back there? He's better than Kanseiteikun and Kiyomasaâ€¦ I wanted to make him a true warrior. I wanted to see how far the owner of a poor country dojo and a peasant's son could go. We shared the same dream! So what am I doing hereâ€¦? Why was I spared after leaving Kondou-san behind!? I abandoned a friend I never should've left behind! **You should have survived**!"

"Toshi," I began softly, closing my eyes and burying my cheek into his shoulder, feeling his fingers dig into my back as his hands shook again.

Nii-san, please don't beat yourself up for thisâ€¦ Please!

"Just as you care about Kondou-san, Kondou-san didn't want you to die. He wanted you to live on!" Chizuru said softly as I noticed she'd come to support him at his back. "So I think that this was inevitable."

Toshi lessened the tight hold he had on me, looking back.

I looked at him and smiled sadly, rubbing my left arm gingerly as I looked over my shoulder at the dying sun.

Souji, please forgive me! I couldn't obey your wish.

* * *

><p>"Kondou-san's been arrested!?"

"! Yeah."

"I see! Hijikata-san's got a heavy burden on his shoulders, now!"

"_I thought I heard someone complaining_."

Shimada-san and Shinpachi looked up to see me coming forward.

Shinpachi huffed and smiled at me, "yer lookin' beautiful as always, Kawa-chan." He greeted.

I chuckled and smirked at him, folding my arms calmly, "shut up. Oi, so what brings you here? And where's your partner in crime?" I wondered.

"Just came to check in with you lot; we ****are**** still part of the Shinsengumi, y'know. And Sano! well, Sano is Sano." He shrugged.

I nodded, smiling in relief. "I know, and I'm glad you two are still alright. Kisuke should be around here somewhere." I noted, looking around.

"Oi, look what the dog dragged in." Kisuke barked as he trotted forward, a wide grin on his lips.

"Yo, Kisuke!" Shinpachi beamed, extending his left fist out as Kisuke touched knuckles with him, both men grinning like idiots (which they still were to me!).

>"What're you doing here, Shinpatsu?" Kisuke wondered, standing at my side.<p>

Shinpachi rubbed the back of his neck, "I've got some important errands to run, so I'm on my way back to Edo."

"What a shame; it's been so long since we last saw each other." Shimada-san lamented quietly.

Kisuke sighed and then clapped a hand on his friend's shoulder, "regardless, we'll see each other again most likely, so there's not much need to look like a drowned cat." He mused calmly.

Shinpachi looked at him and then laughed, nodding, "yeah, you've got a point. We're still fighting under the same sky." He amended with a smile.

* * *

><p>AN: _a bittersweet ending to the chap, neh? things will pick up

soon so look forward to that._

**Sano**: please **review** Porcelain-chan's fic; thanks a mil~
;)

15. Rise, Rise Holy War

A/N:_ where we last left off, Kondou-san had surrendered of his own will to the Satcho forces that had ambushed him, Toshi, Chizuru, Kisuke, Kawa, Shimada and the troops they had stationed with them at the would-be rendezvous point for Saitou and Souji when they were done training the troops. the chap ended on a bittersweet note but now the noose is tighter._

how will Toshi handle shouldering the weight of being the new Commander of the Shinsengumi? and Kawa... will Souji forgive her for letting Kondou-san die on her watch? the answers will be found in this chap and the next one, so enjoy!

disclaimer: i don't own Hakuouki: Kawa and Kisuke belong to me.

* * *

><p>Chapter Fifteen: Rise, Rise... Holy War>>

God he was an idiot!

"Kawa, you shoulda stayed back with Chizuru-chan!" Shinpachi declared as I sprinted forward to come to his side.

I huffed, "she's fine over there; it's my brother I'm worried about." I replied, widening my eyes slightly at the smoke that rose up from Utsunomiya Castle like hulking black plumes. "***TOSHI**!" I shouted, grunting and sprinting faster than Shinpachi, Kisuke and Shimada-san.

"Kawa, come back! **It's too dangerous**!" Kisuke shouted at my back.

I ignored him, leaping over the felled bodies of soldiers in my way as I hurried inside the falling building.

Smoke stung at my lungs, making me cough and hack; I undid the _haori_ wrapped around my waist and pulled it over my mouth to keep from dying of inhalation, rushing past the burning rooms in search of my brother. "***TOSHI**!" I called, perking up as flames seemed to close off one room in particular; I hurried forward, leaping over the wall of flames that tried to burn me before I stumbled a little as I landed inside the room.

"***TOSHI**!" I shouted again, walking further into the ruined room before I stepped on something; I looked down past the smoke making my eyes water to see the felled form of my brother. "Toshi, Toshi wake up!" I shouted, kneeling at his side and helping him up, looking at him worriedly as blood dripped freely from the injuries to his chest.

Sword wounds | who did this? I wondered, holding his face in my

hands. "Brother, please! It's me, Kawa! **Toshi**!" I cried, shaking him.

His brow quivered before he opened his eyes, blearily looking at me. "K-Kawa?" He rasped, coughing as the smoke got to him and looking away as he hacked and coughed, shaking a little.

I offered him one of the sleeves of my haori, covering his mouth and nose with the fabric, looking over the flames that had cornered us. "***SHINPATSU**!* KISUKE**!* SHIMADA-SAN**!" I shouted for them.

A rushing of footsteps sounded before the three aforementioned men ran inside, helping me gather my brother to his feet and rush back out of the room and out of the corridor to the clean air of the outside.

A round of coughing came from the men as Toshi fell forward on his hands and knees, panting; I gripped my knees as I doubled over, panting from having run so much, looking at the burned ends of the haori on the ground.

I smiled slightly, gathering the haori and stamping out the burned ends, slipping my arms through the sleeves and looking at my brother as he seemed to recall his wounds. "Toshi," I began as I went to his side.

"We got him," Kisuke assured as he and Shimada-san lifted him by the arms, supporting him over their shoulders.

I nodded, smiling in relief. "Thanks, boys," I replied, walking alongside Shinpachi as we retreated to camp.

:::::::::oOo:::::::::

The sound of someone grating an ink stick roused me.

I grumbled, opening an eye to see an amber glow coming from one end of the room; my brow twitched as I opened both eyes slowly to see my brother sitting up in bed, poured over a letter he had started writing on the folding desk.

"And just what the hell are you doing?" I grumbled, stirring his attention.

Toshi looked over at me from my spot sleeping near the door and his violet eyes softened; he looked down at the letter, the brush moving over the paper. "I see you're still alive," he returned calmly.

I arched my back and stretched the kinks out of my arms, yawning. "I can say the same about you, nii-san," I grumbled, rubbing my neck gingerly. "How long was I out?"

"A few hours." He glanced up at me from writing. "Though judging by the bags under your eyes, you look like you needed those hours."

I blushed slightly and smirked, looking to see I'd slept with my haori used as a blanket; I looked at the burned ends of the fabric and frowned softly, sighing before I shuffled to sit at his side.

"Piss off, at least I wasn't about to die in a bleeding inferno like you were." I quipped, fixing my vest I'd unbuttoned, buttoning it.

Toshi chuckled quietly, continuing to write. "Souji would've killed me if he'd seen you rush into a burning building to save my ass." He muttered.

I blinked and then chuckled, smiling thoughtfully as I looked down at the pendant I wore on my neck. "He woulda killed you first and then me for being so reckless."

He smiled thoughtfully, nodding. "Thank you for doing that, even though if I weren't still recuperating I'd give you the scolding myself in his absence."

I sniffed and pouted, seeing him smirk at my quieted silence; I sighed after a long moment and lifted my arms to undo the blue hair-tie that kept my hair up, airing out my hair that had gotten longer since we'd first gotten more serious about the war. "So who did you fight this time around? Judging by those injuries, I would imagine they weren't administered by just any Satcho dog." I wondered quietly, perking his ears.

Toshi quieted and his fingers gripped the wood of the brush. "Kazama." My head shot up at the name; his violet eyes hardened. "He used some blade called the Doji-giri Yasutsuna, a demon-slaying sword. It works just as well on Fury as it does on oni." He informed darkly.

I tucked a few strands of hair behind my left ear, huffing. "So he used the big-guns on you; he must really be afraid of you to be using such a double-edged weapon." I mused.

He chuckled quietly, smirking a little. "Must be." He looked at me and his eyes caught the pendant around my neck, his eyes softening. "Did Souji give you that?"

I nodded, smiling thoughtfully. "Back when we were in Edo, he bought it for me from a stand vendor." I replied quietly, remembering the promise we'd made to live in Edo when everything was over and the war was won.

Toshi's eyes softened again and he smiled. "It suits you." He mused.

I blinked and then smirked gently. "Geez, I'm not Chizu-chan; quit tryin' to charm me." I teased.

His face colored pink and he huffed, scowling down at the unfinished letter before him. "W-who said I was trying to do that to her?" He grumbled.

I giggled and smiled innocently when he sent me a death glare. "Toshi, I've seen the way you are around her. If that isn't love, then I don't know what love is." I mused, combing my fingers through my hair and letting it rest on my left shoulder. "And don't compare it to Souji and me; just because we sleep together and whatnot doesn't mean he doesn't love me as much as I love him. Lust isn't what keeps us together, even though it looks like it does." I added

warningly.

He opened his mouth to retort and then thought better of it, closing his mouth and sighing. "Apparently there's no besting you either; you and Chizuru hang around each other too muchâ€¦ it's kind of scary." He muttered in defeat.

I blinked again before I smiled thoughtfully, looking down at my hands gathered in my lap.

"What the hell didja expect? In case you haven't noticed, we're the only two women who have stuck around you guys for this long. Even though our beginnings in the Shinsengumi were different, we're still women of the Shinsengumiâ€¦ We have a family with the Shinsengumi. And we both want to protect our familyâ€¦ I at least know I do." I explained softly.

Toshi quieted again and smiled, picking up his brush and continuing to write. "And that is what makes the both of you strong women of the Shinsengumi. Even when most women would recoil from the sight of bloodshed, you both stand strong against it and walk forward." He mused.

I nodded and smiled as well. "Damn straight." I mused with a chuckle.

The door slid open then to reveal Chizuru holding onto a brown haori; she blinked at seeing both of us awake. "Hijikata-san! You shouldn't be up; you nearly died!" She chided, holding the haori close before she shuffled closer into the room.

I daintily covered my mouth to hide a snicker at his expense, ignoring the scowl he sent at me.

"Who 'nearly died'? My injuries weren't that bad." Toshi huffed.

Chizuru would have none of it, "at any rate, you should put this on; you're going to get sick." She walked forward to put the haori over his shoulders.

"Also, if your injuries weren't that bad, then why have you been bedridden for over two weeks?" I wondered coolly.

Toshi sniffed and pouted, making me giggle. "Piss off." He grumbled, looking away.

I shrugged, "no need to bite my head off, nii-san. 'Sides, I'm just statin' the obvious." I remarked, lifting my hands in surrender.

He huffed again, perking his ears as Chizuru covered her mouth to hide a giggle, the pout returning. "Not you too, Chizuruâ€¦" He grated.

I smiled innocently when he shot me a scowl, shrugging again.

"Anyway, please go back to bed once you've finished that paperwork. Don't think you can work behind my back, either! Kawa-chan and I have been making sure you don't overexert yourself in your current

condition and it'd be horrible if we let that happen to you, so we're going to keep an eye on you." Chizuru said, brushing off the look he shot at her for laughing at his expense with ease, sitting next to me.

Toshi quieted and smirked softly at her scolding. "I'm sorry to have put you out; the both of you." He apologized, perking her ears as well as mine.

I quirked a brow and then smiled, sighing. "At this point in time, I'm used to it. Besides, what's with ****_you_****, actin' all tough around my scary big brother? I'm impressed, Chizu-chan." I elbowed the girl, smiling at her blushing face.

"O-oh, um wellâ€¦" She stammered, the blush burning her cheeks, as she looked down at her lap.

Toshi rolled his eyes at my teasing; I chuckled softly and smiled again, folding an arm around her shoulders in a sisterly way and squeezing. "Ya don't have to explain anythin', 'kay, Chizu-chan?" I assured gently.

Chizuru looked at me and she smiled humbly, nodding. "Okay; thanks, Kawa-chan."

I smiled lightly. "No big."

"_Fukuchou!_" The door slid open as Kisuke, Shimada-san and the latest face added to the mix, a brunette in a green Western suit by the name of Otori Keisuke, piled into the room, making Chizuru jump.

I blinked and then patted her back gently, smirking at the trio.

"Hijikata-kun, are you sure you should be up?" Otori wondered.

"Yeah, I see you came too, Otori-san; thanks for everything." Toshi replied.

Shimada-san sighed in relief, "thank God, I feared the worst!"

I chuckled, "well my brother isn't a dainty flower, now is he?" I joked, effortlessly ignoring the pout sent my way by said _oni-fukuchou_.

"Yasakawa-kun, I must commend you for standing by your brother for so long! It's a rarity to see in a lovely woman like you." Otori commented, perking my ears.

I blushed slightly and then laughed sheepishly, waving it off.

"Aww, you're making me blush; but it's nothing, really! To be honest, I chock it up to being a Hijikata. There has to be strength in that name otherwise Toshi or I wouldn't be standing." I admitted humbly, looking at my brother and smiling. "Right, nii-san?"

Toshi nodded, smiling back. "Right."

"Anyway, Hijikata-kun, the way you fought at Utsunomiya was just like an _oni_ god! The soldiers' morale has sky-rocketed and everyone is singing praises about you." Otori declared in awe before the awe faded from his face and he turned business.

"But the way you fought was an absolute failure as an advisor; it's most problematic." He stated.

I blinked and felt a sweatdrop form on my brow. "Um, Otori-kunâ€¦" I began quietly.

"O-Otori-san, the Vice-Commander is still recuperating, andâ€¦!" Kisuke chimed as we both felt a sliver of fear trail down our spinesâ€¦ and it wasn't for our safety, but for Otori Keisuke and his big mouth that may or may not get him in hot water with my brother.

"No, let me speak my mind!" Otori quieted us, looking at my brother hard. "Now listen up, Hijikata-kun: the advisor is the leader. If a leader dies, we can't continue the fight even if his subordinates are still alive!" He stated.

****Damn****, this guy had _balls_â€¦ I had to thank him for being so bold later on... If my brother didn't kill him first, that is!

Toshi quieted and huffed under his breath.

"H-hey, Hijikata-kun, what's so funny? I'm quite serious about this!" He quieted when he noticed the strange light in my brother's eyes. "I-I don't care what you say or how you threaten me, I'm not going to back down!"

Kisuke and I shared a look before looking at the two men.

Otori Keisuke, you just might be my hero.

"Yeah, I know, Otori-san. I'm sorry for all the trouble I've caused you." Toshi finally answered as his violet eyes softened again.

The sound of feet moving near the door from the porch perked my ears, "â€¦****I helped, too****!"

We all looked to see Shinpachi in the doorway, a wide smirk on his lips.

>"Nagakura-san!" Chizuru declared surprisedly.<p>

Shinpachi shuffled to sit across from me near my brother. "You look fine to me; I shouldn't have worried about ya." He mused.

"I haven't fallen far enough for _you_ to worry about me," Toshi remarked with a huff.

Shinpachi chuckled, "you're the same as ever, Hijikata-san!"

Kisuke and I laughed quietly with both Toshi and Shinpachi.

I smiled at them, almost imagining we were back in Kyoto, fighting to keep a name for ourselves and make it stick. When the noose around our neck wasn't even present, practically nonexistentâ€¦ When we could drink _sake_ and not worry so much about where our enemy was

coming from" When we could draw our swords to defend our lives, our loved ones, and the Shinsengumi name.

"I'll bet you miss those old days too, huh, Kondou-san? I know I do."

* * *

><His back being slammed into the tree made me wince.<

"Why did you let Kondou-san die!?" His green eyes were hurt and blazing anger, making the wince return: I'd never seen him this distraught. "Say something!" He shouted.

My hands at my sides balled into fists as I scowled and walked forward; I elbowed his chest, forcing him away from my brother, baffling both men. "***Enough**", Souji!" I shouted, gripping his arms and looking up at his green eyes, hoping to see some light in his gaze.

"Kawa" He gritted his teeth and looked to be on the verge of tears, further surprising me. "Why didn't you stop him? You were with him the whole damn time!" He demanded, his arms shaking in my grip.

I flinched and looked down, gripping the sleeves of his coat. "I tried, Souji, I tried! Toshi and I we tried to get him to go, but he wouldn't budge! Souji please, please believe me!" My voice was starting to crack. "H-he wanted me to tell you that he was sorry. And I I failed you, Souji. I couldn't protect him and I hate myself for it!" I croaked.

Souji's green eyes widened. "K-Kawa," he looked down, closing his eyes tightly.

I shook my head softly, releasing his arms of one hand to stroke his left cheek; he held my hand to his face, his teeth grinding together to fight the pain of his loss: I released his second arm to fold my own around his waist as I held onto him.

He buried his face into my hair, a strangled groan escaping him as he held me tightly, crushing me to his body; I quieted and buried my cheek into his chest, holding onto him just as tight.

Toshi was quiet behind us, seeming to also mourn the loss that had made Souji so distraught.

"Are you okay now?" I asked softly, sniffing and looking up at him hopefully.

Souji cracked a weak smirk, nodding. "I'm just glad that you're safe. I I hate what happened, I hate it like you wouldn't believe, but I remembered that I made you a promise, that day in Edo on the streets. I I don't want to leave you, not when I need you now more than ever."

He broke our staring contest to look past me at my brother, his green eyes slightly stoic again.

"I can't forgive what happened, but I can't just leave, either. Not

when I made a promise! I'm going to stay, but I'm ****_not_**** doing it for ****you**** anymore. ****I'm doing it for her****__." He stated to my brother, his arms giving a gentle squeeze in indication of me.

"Okita-san," Chizuru began in surprise before she seemed to smile.

Toshi nodded, his violet eyes saddened. "I understand. Thank you, Souji, for staying." He said quietly.

Souji nodded back curtly, looking down at me. "Come on, you look exhausted." He mused softly, sliding his arms from my waist to lead me by the hand onto the porch and to the room he had.

I looked over my shoulder at my brother and smiling weakly for him before I let Souji drag me away.

* * *

><p>AN: ****NO SOUJI DIDN'T DIE****__ i felt like this should be a treat to not only myself but to the other Okita Souji fangirls/guys out there who're reading this fic and haven't reviewed just yet. anywho, i was even losing sleep over how the hell i should stage this twist in the plot, and even though i got sleep, i'm glad i managed to pull it off effectively. _

****Kawa****_: oi, ****review please****! thanks a mil~ ****huggles Souji****

****Souji****_: Kawa-chan my love~! ****gropes****

****Kawa****_: pervert! ****/backhands sharply****

****Souji****_: ****OW****~ D;

16. Untitled 03 - Burning

A/N: _where we last left off, Kawa, Shinpachi, Kisuke, and Shimada-san had saved Toshi from burning in an inferno at Utsunomiya Castle. unlike in the anime, Souji didn't leave and instead made a choice to stay for Kawa, not for Toshi. more to come so enjoy this chap!_

****disclaimer****: i don't own Hakuouki; Kawa and Kisuke belong to me.

* * *

><p>Chapter Sixteen: Untitled 03 - Burning_

He wasn't lying next to me.

I sat up in bed, looking around and seeing the door to the room was open that led out to the porch; I shuffled to my feet, drawing the collar of my sleeping yukata closer to my chest, as I stepped out onto the porch.

Souji was sitting with his back to me, seeming to be staring into

space.

I shuffled and sat down at his left, keeping my eyes away from his face and out at the darkened grounds.

"You should be sleeping."

"Why aren't ****you****?"

He seemed to quiet, huffing softly. "Pretty sure you know why."

"Ah."

"Mm-hm."

I looked at my right arm, rolling the sleeve of the robe up to see the old bandages from when it had been grazed that day Toshi and I fought the Satcho soldiers.

"Idiot bastard."

"It wasn't his fault; they surrounded us, three hundred or so, and if I hadn't stepped in—" I trailed off.

A shaky sigh, "That's not the point, Yasakawa."

I winced when he spoke my full name, looking out into the darkness. "Enlighten me."

"I left with Hajime-kun with the hopes that he would protect you, or at least keep you out of the crossfire, for me in my stead. But seeing these scars—" He growled under his breath.

"They were my own doing. I charged into battle with him, I was the one the soldiers were trying to pump full of iron—" _It wasn't Toshi_."

"I said I was going to stay with you, and I meant every damn word. I'm not going to leave you, Yasakawa. But the thing with your brother—" Another shaky sigh, "That's going to take a while."

I quieted and brushed locks of hair from my cheek, "I guess I'll have to live with that." I finally looked at him, at the disheveled brown hair that framed his handsome face, his green eyes peering into the night reminding me of a cat. "Do you want to come to bed?"

His shoulders slumped with a weary sigh and then he nodded, looking at me and smiling a little. "Yeah."

I nodded, shuffling to my feet and extending a hand to him; he took it, letting me help him up before dragging him back inside the room, letting him close the door behind us. I released his hand when we reached the futon; my fingers were dragging gently down his chest as I leaned up to kiss him, pleading with my kiss for him to be my Souji again, to hold onto me and prove to me that he was okay.

"Kawa," his grumbled complain shifted to a low moan as his fingers dragged down my waist to my hips, remembering the paths his fingers took as I shrugged the collar of my yukata down my

shoulders.

Souji held me possessively to his body, the cracks and crevices disappearing between us, settling me on the futon back-first as he towered over me, grinding and biting my exposed neck greedily, moaning softly against my bared neck; I mewled and panted, gasping his name as my fingers pulled his yukata off his shoulders to let me drag my nails down his toned chest hungrily.

"I love you, Souji," I moaned, gasping and then crying out when he ended the torture and sank in deeply.

Will you still forgive me for letting Kondou-san die?

:::::oOo:::::

"Souji."

"Hn?"

"Do you hate me?"

He lifted his head a little from its spot against my hickey-laden neck, green eyes sleepy. "For what?"

"For what happened." I replied.

He groaned softly as his back arched and he traced his fingers down my upper thigh, "well, you were a bit rusty, but I still managed to make you scream enough times." He shrugged, resting his cheek on my shoulder.

I shivered lightly when he pushed in a little further as his back arched, my nails digging into his back out of reflex. "N-not thatâ€¦ You know."

"Ah." He quieted as he had earlier before we'd made love and traced circles on my thigh lazily. "It wasn't your fault."

"But do youâ€¦ aren't you upset with me?"

He kissed my neck gingerly, groaning again. "I'm not pissed with you, Kawa. I'm sorry if I seemed that way, earlier tonight. But even though what happenedâ€¦ y'know, happened, it doesn't change that I love you. I've always loved you, ever since you first joined the Shinsengumi five years ago, and nothing is going to change how I feel about you, dummy. Not evenâ€¦" He trailed off. "Y'get it?"

I nodded, running my fingers through his thoroughly-disheveled brown hair. "Yeah. I've never seen you look like you did, earlier, and I don't want to see you look like that again. It killed me to know that you would probably hate me for not being able to stop what happened." I admitted softly.

Souji nodded, chuckling bitterly. "I guess we're both pretty fucked up, huh?" He guessed.

I nodded slightly, smiling softly at hearing him sound like his usual self. "Yeah, though getting back to "earlier", earlier, you were

rather rusty yourself, kitty." I mused, perking his ears.

He seemed to smirk at my comment. "Shut up, I still rocked your world. Admit it." He quipped gently.

I huffed and smiled at him, tracing my fingers down the scratches I'd left on his upper right shoulderblade, "you did, yeah." I sighed when he nuzzled into my neck. "You really missed me." I muttered.

Souji chuckled softly and lifted his head to smirk down at me, "I always miss you, babe. Especially when we're apart for more than several hours, it's veryâ€¦" He kissed me deeply, warmly, "very," he bit my lower lip gently and tugged in the same manner. "â€¦ Hard to keep from dragging you to my bed as soon as I see you standing there with that happy smile on your lips whenever I get back, especially moreso when you pounce me." He said, his voice an alluring purr that made me tremble.

I groaned and gently pushed on his chest, smiling, "I thought you were sore," I griped.

Souji chuckled, pressing his forehead to mine and nuzzling. "Pretty sure we both are. You more than me; you've been on the road longer than I have." He admitted, kissing my forehead before settling back down ontop of me.

I blushed reflexively and nodded, snuggling with him and yawning widely. "Point," I muttered.

He stifled a yawn and nodded sleepily, holding me close, "I love you."

I smiled in relief at hearing that from him, "I love you, too."

After shedding tears, talking of promises, and at long last making love, we both fell into a well-earned sleep.

* * *

><p>Kisuke yawned loud as we showed up to breakfast the next morning.<p>

"Well I was wondering where the noises were coming from." He mused, perking my ears as Souji sat down and I sat at his left.

I blushed and spluttered a huff, glaring at him, "piss off, I don't see you gettin' laid so don't judge me, Kisuke-kun." I defended with a sniff, ignoring the death glare Souji shot at my old friend as I started eating.

"Don't tell me you two were drinking too; y'sound pissier than usual." He wondered, sipping his tea.

>
THWACK_**.

"Quit pesterin' my woman, idiot." Souji grumbled as he cracked his knuckles, sipping his own tea generously.

I blinked in slight confusion: did Souji just brain Kisuke..?

"Oi, that hurt!" Kisuke yelled, rubbing his head gingerly.

A patient sigh sounded, "What in hell are you doing? You're going to wake up Hijikata-san," Saitou asked as he shuffled into the dining room and sat down at Kisuke's right, looking from him to Souji to me with slightly sleepy blue eyes.

"He started it." Souji said around a clump of rice in his mouth, jerking his thumb at the aforementioned man.

Kisuke shot him a sore look, huffing. "I wasn't the one makin' loud noises last night." He quipped, stuffing his face with rice.

I rolled my eyes, looking at Saitou and offering a sheepish look. "Sorry for the disturbances; how's my brother?" I wondered, meeting his blue stare.

Saitou sipped his tea, being the essence of tranquility as he often was at breakfast. "He's still recuperating. Yukimura is looking after him," he replied.

I nodded and lifting a brow as I noticed Souji had quieted, lowering my gaze. "Kinda glad he didn't hear Kisuke and Souji barking at each other this early; he woulda come outta bed just to brain you two." I mused, smiling weakly.

Saitou smiled a little, nodding. "That he would, knowing how much of a short fuse he is." He chimed.

Souji met my gaze I shot at him before his green eyes softened as he must've seen the concern in my eyes, squeezing my hand gently.
>I squeezed back, sipping my tea and looking away.<p>

Will you ever be able to forgive him for what happened to Kondou-san, Souji?

.....oOo.....

"You're going too?" I tilted my head to one side.

Kisuke shrugged and nodded, smiling. "You and Okita-san are here manning the fort while Hijikata-san is recuperating, so it only makes sense for me to go with Saitou." He explained.

I sighed and nodded back, clapping a hand on his shoulder and squeezing. "If that's the case, have fun out there; just don't get killed." I replied.

He smiled again and ruffled my hair affectionately. "I won't. Just don't burn the place while we're gone." He remarked with a chuckle.

I rolled my eyes and smacked his chest playfully, smirking. "That I can't make promises on," I replied lightly.

"Ichinose-san, are you coming?" Shimada-san called.

We both looked to see him and Saitou already at the gates, Saitou in the lead.

>"Yeah, yeah," he sighed, trotting forward.<p>

"You three be careful!" I hollered, waving.

Saitou looked over at me and smiled a little. "Will do, you two take care of Hijikata-san; we can't have him acting hot-headed once again." He replied.

I chuckled and smirked again, watching him, Shimada-san, and Kisuke leave the compound on horseback.

A pair of arms wrapped around my waist before the owner sighed. "Alone at last!" He purred.

I giggled, smiling up at his green eyes. "I still need to check on my brother," I pointed out as he squeezed my belly.

"He's doin' fine, Chizuru-chan told me so." Souji informed lightly, his fingers tugging on the lower buttons of my vest.

I pouted at being defeated so easily and sighed, detangling his arms from my belly to lead him inside by the hand. "Since when are you so horny?" I wondered of him.

He sidled up to my side, squeezing my hand gently. "Since there's no one to complain about us making noiseâ€|" He replied calmly, undeterred from my reluctance, seeming happy about Kisuke's absence.

I smiled and looked up at him, elbowing his arm. "You're being possessive lately," I pointed out.

Souji smirked and sighed, scooping me off the floor to carry me bridal-style to the room, making me squeak and cling to him; he snickered. "I can't help it, it's part of me," he replied jovially.

I blushed and pouted up at him, "So I noticed."

* * *

><p>"Aizu, I imagine; after all, those Choshuu bastards despise Aizu." Toshi declared as he walked in first, Souji at his heels as Chizuru and I followed them.<p>

"Hijikata-san, Souji, girls!" Heisuke exclaimed in relief at seeing us present.

"Well, we were wonderin' when you were going to show up; fashionably late, as usual." Kisuke chimed with a smirk.

I met his cobalt eyes and chuckled, sitting down next to Souji. "Better late than never, Kisuke-kun." I jibed, seeing the puckered skin of a thin scar on his left cheek was evidence enough that he had followed Saitou into battle.

"Quit whinin', at least we're here; could be worse if we just left ya to rot on the battlefield." Souji remarked calmly, smirking.

"So I imagine your injuries have healed?" Saitou asked of my brother,

effortlessly changing subject before both men could start barking at each other.

>Toshi nodded, smiling slightly, "yeah; sorry to have worried you."<p>

"And here I got to take it easy while you were gone!" Heisuke lamented, arms folding behind his head leisurely; he smiled cheekily at my brother.

"Don't you mean you didn't have enough work to do?" Toshi remarked with a smirk.

Sannan-san smiled, "At any rate, it's a relief; you're our pillar of support, so morale will increase with you back."

Toshi quieted as we nodded in agreement with Sannan-san's words; he looked to Saitou. "Saitou, sorry about making you stand in for me."

>Saitou smiled and shrugged, "it's nothing."<p>

Chizuru and I shared a look and then smiled at them.

:::::::::oOo:::::::::

Another cannon went off, making the ground shake.

Two bullets whizzed by my head; I sprinted forward at the gunmen, left foot uppercutting into the chin of one soldier as my katana sliced the throat of the second soldier, quickly swinging my blade and ramming it into the heart of the first one my foot had kicked the jaw of.

Maybe having oni and Fury around was starting to make me faster... Or maybe it really was the Hijikata blood in my veins.

A soldier gave a battle cry and flew at me, swinging his katana high; I made to lunge at him before a katana stabbed into his heart from behind. The soldier spluttered and fell forward when the blade was yanked free of his chest, making me look past him to a pair of cobalt eyes.

I nodded, smiling at him. "Thanks," I replied as he flicked his wrist, the blood flying from his blade.

Kisuke shrugged, "wasn't much."

Another cannon went off, making me wince slightly; he clicked his tongue and scowled over his shoulder.

"Let's move," I declared, leading the way to where my brother and Souji were, Kisuke at my heels.

:::::::::oOo:::::::::

"We're retreating to Sendai!?" He grit his teeth.

He nodded, "No matter how hard we fight, it's only a matter of time before Aizu falls. From what I've heard, Enomoto-san is having the Old Bakufu Army escape from Edo and head up north. I think our only

option is to retreat to Sendai, request reinforcements, and bide our time to attempt a comeback."

"You mean to abandon the Aizu Clan?" Toshi growled; Kisuke and Saitou looked up at the notion as he slammed his palms onto the tabletop separating him and Otori. "Did Lord Katamori approve of this plan!?"

Otori quieted and looked grim, "it was Lord Katamori's plan."

"He came up with this!?" Kisuke demanded.

He kept his hazel green eyes downward, "But Lord Katamori intends to remain with the Aizu Clan and fight until the last man falls."

"Then we should acknowledge his warrior spirit and help him fight!" Toshi protested.

I looked up at him, feeling Souji squeeze my hand as he must've seen the worried look in my face. "Toshiâ€¦"

"Lord Katamori has a warrior's pride: he has resolved to share the fate of his Aizu Clan. We should bide our time instead of throwing his warrior's pride and spirit to waste!" Otori silenced him and Kisuke as the latter made to open his mouth and agree with my brother.

"Otori-kun, please, we can't allow Katamori to dig his own grave; if the Aizu fall, then there's no stopping those damn Satcho bastardsâ€¦" I finally spoke up, looking at the brunette sharply.

"Then I'm ordering this as Governor General!" He snapped, slightly surprising me.

I quieted reluctantly, nodding. "_Hai_."

"We're retreating to Sendai: begin preparations to retreat immediately." Otori added to my brother, seeing him nod begrudgingly before he left the tent, dismissing the meeting.

"This is horrible, it's a repeat of what happened to Kondou-san," Toshi growled angrily.

Souji and I winced at the memory; I looked at my brother. "Toshi," I began quietly, looking down.

Having warrior's pride was just another way of saying you were perfectly fine with committing suicide. Even though I had spent over four years with the Shinsengumi living and abiding by the warrior's code, suicide was the farthest thing from my mind. I wanted to die by old age with Souji at my side, not by seppuku!

"I'll stay behind."

Souji, Toshi and I looked up alertly at the owner of the voice.

"Saitou-kunâ€¦" I began.

"Saitou?" Toshi breathed.

"As Otori-san said, it might be a matter of time before the Aizu Clan fallsâ€¦ but the Aizu Clan has protected us up until now. As a warrior, I want to put my heart into helping this clan since they're fighting like warriors until the end." Saitou looked at his shocked violet eyes. "Hijikata-san, please go to Sendai." He requested.

"Hajime-kun, yer not seriousâ€¦" Souji began.

"I'm gonna stay, too." Kisuke chimed.

My eyes widened slightly; I looked at him. "Kisuke-kun," I began.

"Ichinose-kun, you don't have to stay for my sake; just because we're friends doesn't mean you have to stay to help the Aizu Clanâ€¦" Saitou began to try and reason with him.

"I'm staying. You're going to need all the help you can get, Saitou. Besides, what better way to go than go down swinging?" Kisuke argued, smirking calmly, his cobalt eyes content.

I shook my head and scowled at him, "in all the time that I've known you, not once did I ever believe you would do something like this, Kisuke." I declared.

Kisuke met my gaze and he smiled softly, reminding me of those days in Reishin when we would hang around after the day was done and we were worn out from sparring. "Yeah, I know, I guess I've always seemed like the cautious type, even when we were kids. But I want to do this, to make sure you guys don't die just yetâ€¦ Not before you reach the top of that hill." He took on a determined look that reminded me of the last time we sparred before my mother passed away several months after.

"Kisuke," I quieted and looked down, exhaling sharply after a long moment; I looked up at him and smiled gently. "Don't go acting like a big-shot now that you're so tough, okay? Otherwise you'll put Saitou-kun and Lord Katamori to shame before the battle begins." I requested, my voice starting to sound hoarse to my own ears.

Kisuke nodded, smiling back. "I'll try."

Souji huffed and extended his hand out to him, slightly surprising him. "Kick some ass for us, Ichinose-kun." He smirked; he paused and smiled wryly, taking his hand and gripping his wrist in camaraderie.

Saitou smiled at them and shook his head softly, catching my eye; I met his blue gaze and smiled softly.

>
If this is what you want to do, then don't die doing it, Saitou Hajime: whatever you do, don't die for this_.

"Is it true we're retreating to Sendai?" Heisuke asked as he and Sannan-san entered the tent.

Shimada-san nodded, "so it seems."

"Then I'm going to Sendai ahead of everyone; I'm originally from Sendai, so I have connections there. I'm ideal for gathering inside information." Sannan-san offered calmly.

"But Sannan-san, everyone thinks you're dead, remember?" Heisuke reminded.

Sannan-san huffed quietly, "I'll get around that somehow."

Toshi looked at him and nodded, "but the Fury aren't suited for being forerunners." He pointed out.

"We can move during the day if we push ourselves. It's better than being on the defense." He argued calmly.

"Sannan-san might be the best man for the job if he can do it," Shimada-san chimed.

Tosh sighed, "Fine!"

"You said we had to hurry, so—" Sannan-san mused, turning to exit the tent.

Heisuke looked at my brother, "I'm goin' with Sannan-san. I'm kinda afraid of letting him out of my sight." He mused.

"I'm counting on you," Toshi nodded, sending him off.

"Be careful, Heisuke-kun!" Chizuru piped up as he made to leave.

Heisuke smiled and nodded, "leave everything to me! Neh, Souji, you comin'?" He looked at him.

Souji huffed, "nah, I'll pass. 'Sides, one of us hasta protect the girls if yer not here actin' like a hothead." He declined calmly, glancing my way and winking.

He rolled his eyes and chuckled, "alright, see ya later." He waved before hurrying out of the tent.

I ribbed Souji, "oi, I'm not a damsel." I chided.

He smirked and tousled my hair affectionately. "Nope, yer too bull-headed to be like that." He quipped.

I blushed and elbowed him again, huffing; my eyes glanced over to see Saitou and Kisuke and softened.

They really are twins, if not by blood then by their spirit.

* * *

><p>AN: _whew, long chap! lol i sort of combined eps 18 and 19 for this chap so that explains things.. anyway, the fic is winding down so look forward to the next few chaps._

**Souji**: oi, what's this? _no reviews?_ what the hell's up with you lot?

**Kawa**: **_/backhands him_** ignore him and **just review**.
thanks!

17. Bright Lights

A/N:** IHUMBLYAPOLOGIZEFORNOTUPDATINGSOONERPLEASEFORGIVEME /bows
low** erm.. *_cough_* long time no see yeah? that's all i've got so
enjoy the chap!

disclaimer: i don't own Hakuouki; Kawa belongs to me.

* * *

><p>Chapter Seventeen: Bright Lights**

I peered at his downcast violet stare.

He looked up from the corner of his eye and scowled. "What are you doing?" He demanded.

"Huh, so you are still in there." I mused, sitting back from leaning in to look at him, tapping my chin thoughtfully with a finger. "Good to know."

He deadpanned, "of course I'm still here, where the hell **else** would I be?" He sniffed curiously.

I shrugged; "Off in the vast abyss known as _Oni_-land," Souji commented as he poked his head inside the small meeting room from the back hall, green eyes light.

Toshi scowled reprovngly as the brunette shuffled inside the room to plop down at my left side, crossing his arms over his chest. "'_Off in the vast abyss_' is where your ass is going to be soon if you keep heckling me, Souji."

Souji smiled cheekily and put his hands up in surrender, "don't go getting pissy with me just because ya've got a lot on yer mind. Besides, Kawa was the first one in here so blame her." He added.

THWACK.

"Some nerve you've got, throwing me to the wolves like that." I cracked my knuckles as he now sported a bloody nose.

Toshi smiled smugly at the watery-eyed sore look he sent at me. "There's my sister." He mused calmly.

"Now I **_know_** you two are relatedâ€¦| _fuck_ that hurt, Kawa!" Souji groaned as he held his nose between his right thumb and index finger, his voice nasal.

I giggled and returned the cheeky smile, "Love you too, **kitty**." I winked, blissfully ignoring the eye-twitched glare his green eyes sent.

"Honestly, such language in front of the woman you profess to love," Toshi tsked, joining in.

"Piss off, _oni!_" Souji snapped cattily, turning his eye-twitching glare on my brother.

Toshi shrugged innocently as I snickered.

:::::::::xOx:::::::::

"Actually, I've gone by Sendai Castle several times now, but they never respond to my request for an audience." The Western-looking man named Enomoto declared, sounding as if he was baffled by this information he shared with us (that is to say, Toshi, Souji, and myself).

Toshi's eyes sharpened as Souji and I shared a look, sharing in Enomoto-san's confusion.

Shouldn't Sannan-san have already gotten through to the men at the castle? He hadn't sent any contact info or anything of the sort lately, but I had chocked that up to him still trying to get us connectedâ€|

"I'm coming in," Chizuru announced as she slid open the door and carried a tray of tea, setting out the cups in front of us.

I caught the softened gaze my brother showed to her and smiled inwardly; can't deny that, now can you, nii-san?

"â€| I've caught wind of some strange rumors; supposedly the Sendai Clan has a strange unit." Enomoto went on, stirring me from my thoughts.

"'Strange' how?" Souji wondered, lifting a brow.

He glanced at him and then at my brother, "there's been an increase of murders outside the castle." All four of us â€"Chizuru, Toshi, Souji and meâ€" perked up. "The culprits enter and leave the castle as they please. The castle is unnervingly quietâ€| What could have happened?" He wondered more to himself.

"Enomoto-san, could you let me deal with those murderers? I'd like you to pursue seeking an audience with the _daimyo_." Toshi requested, effortlessly regaining his composure in the face of trouble (as he was wont to do, at this point in time).

"Of course."

Souji, Chizuru, and I remained quiet until the short meeting was over as Enomoto-san left and Toshi showed him out.

"Souji," I began as I helped Chizuru gather the cups.

He nodded, his green eyes stoic. "I know. 'Course I doubt it's who you think it isâ€|" He mused as my brother reentered the room and sat down at his spot.

"So, about those murdersâ€| you don't thinkâ€|?" Chizuru wondered of him.

Toshi's eyes hardened again at the mention, "I can't say for sure since this is a guess."

"Right," she mumbled.

"But if Sannan-san is behind these murders, I'll have to kill him." He stated grimly.

Souji huffed, "geez, you're bull-headed. How many more people hafta tell ya that you're not gonna shoulder these things on your own?" He wondered, meeting his violet stare, his green eyes stoic. "If Sannan-san ****is**** the one doin' the killings, then we're both going to help you, Hijikata-san." He stated, arms crossed over his chest.

Toshi quieted and then smiled wryly, reaching to clap a hand on his shoulder. "And here I was starting to wonder when you'd finally lighten up." He mused.

"Pfeh, piss off, yer still not off the hook just yet. Like I said before, I'm not doin' it for you, I'm doin' it for your sister." He sniffed, smirking cheekily.

Chizuru and I shared a look before we both smiled at them.

"Sure, sureâ€¦| cat." Toshi remarked.

Souji huffed again, his eye twitching. "Oni."

Chizuru giggled.

"Oi, what're you laughin' at, Chizuru-chan?" Souji grated, pouting cutely.

I laughed softly and leaned in to kiss his cheek. "The fact that the two of you never change." I replied lightly.

Toshi deadpanned again as Souji sniffed before his arm snaked to my waist and squeezed. "****Yer both delusional****." They grumbled in chorus.

We both smiled cheekily.

:::::::::xXx:::::::::

"Never thought I'd see the day zombies could walk in the daylight!" His katana severed the head from one of the Fury.

"S-Souji!" The boy called from inside the garden.

I leaped past Souji, grunting and slicing the head off of one of the three Fury that had cornered him, short sword drawn as it stabbed into the heart of another.

Heisuke ripped the head off the last one before turning to me. "Kawa-chan!" He declared in relief.

I nodded, smiling at him before Souji sliced through the remaining Furies to come forward. "You can thank me later, did Kodou send these guys?" I asked, kicking at the dismembered head of one of the

soldiers.

"Yeah. Where's Hijikata-san?" He replied, looking from Souji to me.

Souji nodded. "He's comin', but where's Chizuru-chan?"

"Kodou-san took her; he followed me here from Sendai Castle and then he took her with him." Heisuke explained, seeming angry with himself for letting her slip from his fingers.

"Shit," I grumbled.

"Yasakawa," Toshi barked as he came forward, looking at the dead Furies around us before his violet eyes registered Heisuke standing near us. "Heisuke, what happened?" He demanded.

* * *

><p>"Chizuru, are you okay!?" Heisuke rushed in first.<p>

"Heisuke-kun!" Chizuru sounded like she was beaming in relief.

"Oi, move yer ass, runt, yer not the only one here who's been cuttin' up Fury like there's no tomorrow." Souji nudged him forward into the room by his foot as he and I piled in, Toshi at the rear.

"Okita-san, Kawa-chan!" The girl declared in surprise.

I smiled lightly at her, "Yo, Chizu-chan."

"This castle is strange; there's hardly any castle guards and noone else is here." Toshi mused aloud.

"Hijikata-san!" Chizuru beamed.

Kodou grimaced at his words.

"I thought you would be arriving at any minute, now." Sannan-san mused calmly, as if he hadn't just been found out by Toshi, Souji and myself.

Souji and I stiffened as Toshi walked past us to aim the tip of his katana at his head. "Explain yourself, Sannan-san: did you commit those murders outside the castle?" He demanded coldly.

"No: I may have killed some rampant Fury, but I never murdered indiscriminately." Sannan-san replied in the same calm tone, ignoring the evident death staring him in the eye.

"So explain why the friggin' hell you're with Kodou-san, on top of not leavin' a note?" Souji growled.

Sannan-san ignored him, looking at my brother, "you'll never find what you want in Sendai: the Northern Alliance plans to avoid the war. The way Aizu was thrashed must have scared them." He stated.

I stiffened as I saw Kisuke's face in my mind; my fingers tightened

on the hilt of my _katana_.

"While I was spying on the enemy, I learned that Kodou-san was displeased with the New Government Armyâ€|"

"â€|I came here under top-secret orders from the New Government Army but I'm sick of watching humans fight."

"So I joined forces with him in his goal to create a kingdom of _oni_ that we Furies can live in. I then infiltrated this castle and took over Sendai." Sannan-san explained.

"**What**!?" Toshi and Souji spat in unison as Chizuru, Heisuke and I perked up alertly; I glowered at him. "That explains why the castle seemed spooky," I grumbled.

A rushing of feet sounded before the doors around Sannan-san were thrown open to reveal a horde of _katana_-baring Furies that rushed into the room.

"Shit," Souji hissed as he edged closer to my side, glowering from the Furies to Sannan-san and Kodou-san.

"Every Fury in the country is in this castle: they're the ultimate weapon for toppling the New Government Army." Sannan-san commented calmly.

Kodou-san looked at Chizuru expectantly. "Come and help us, Chizuru. We need you as leader: let's use these Fury to help rebuild the Yukimura Clan."

"Father, if you refuse to let that go, then I can't!" Chizuru declared.

His face contorted into a grimace again.

"What about you, Hijikata-kun: would you care to lead these Furies as we fight to overthrow the New Government Army?" Sannan-san looked to my brother.

"Hijikata-san," Souji began sharply.

Toshi looked over at me before he glared at Sannan-san, "We don't need the Fury Corps to fight! And besides, I have a promise to keep." He growled, his violet eyes stony.

'Our father entrusted me to protect youâ€| I don't know what I'd do if I lost you.' His violet eyes were stony that day too, at the battle of Toba Fushimi.

Toshi.

"Then you've left me with no choice," Sannan-san mused, drawing his _katana_; Toshi stiffened and sank into a fighting stance as I made to step forward, Souji mirroring me. "If you say there isn't a battlefield for us Fury, who can do nothing but fightâ€|"

He lashed out at the Fury to his right, blood flying when the creature fell: I widened my eyes slightly as he cut down a second Fury that lunged at him from the side.

"Putting them out of their misery is the least that I can do!" He stated.

"Heisuke, Souji!" Toshi beckoned as he and Sannan-san stood side-by-side.

Heisuke trotted forward, "I know!"

"Comin'," Souji kissed me hard before he winked and moved forward.

Kodou-san blanched in horror, "_why_, Sannan-kun!?"

"I must apologize, but the Commander of the Shinsengumi's orders are absolute." Sannan-san pushed his glasses up the bridge of his nose gingerly.

Toshi smirked, "were you planning this from the start?"

"In order to deceive your enemy, you must first deceive your allies." He smirked back.

"That was too cool, Sannan-san!" Heisuke chuckled.

Souji huffed and smirked, "that's the Sannan-san we know."

The Furies tensed in their ranks.

"Chizuru," I handed her her short sword; she took it, nodding and smiling at me before she drew the blade and neared my side.

"Fools! How do you plan to fight when the Shinsengumi has lost most of its forces!?" Kodou-san cried.

Sannan-san struck first and cut down one of the Fury; a second one flew at him before Souji severed the head swiftly.

Four Furies flew at us; we both dodged, Chizuru's short sword ramming into the heart of the first two as I severed the head from the third one, blocking the fourth one as he lunged, sparks flying when our blades met.

I rammed my boot into his chest, kicking him away as my _katana_ sliced his head off effortlessly, blood flying.

Chizuru grunted in slight exertion as she was holding her own against the last of the quartet; my short sword flew at his forehead, her own short sword severing the head swiftly and letting it roll as the body fell.

I nodded at her and smiled, "I'm glad all that training pulled off." I declared, perking up as I shoved her out of the way of an oncoming trio, narrowly dodging a swipe from the head Fury as his _katana_ nicked my left shoulder, ripping the sleeve.

Souji crashed into him and sent him back, slicing the head off and then doing the same to the two remaining ones with ease; he looked at us and smirked. "Shake a leg, girls," he declared, rushing forward into the ongoing fray.

I looked at her and winked before I flew after him, reminiscent of the Ikedaya raid a few years ago.

"Father!" Chizuru cried behind me, perking my ears; I looked over my shoulder to see her knelt by her dead father's side, three Fury cornering her with their katana pointed at her face; she gripped the hilt of her short sword.

"Chizuru!" I barked, perking up as Toshi cut down the three Fury with ease, glowering at their felled forms.

Souji cut down the last one, panting slightly and looking at me. "You okay?"

"Yeah," I nodded, flicking my wrist to the side to get the blood off the blade.

"Father, hang in there!" Chizuru begged; I looked at the scene and lowered my gaze, feeling slightly bitter. Even though Kodou-san wasn't really her father, I still felt jealous that she had a father-figure around, growing up; it was just my mother and me, when I was little. I never had a father around.

I sighed and sheathed my katana quietly as Souji did the same; I looked up at him. "Souji, have you y'know, forgiven him?" I asked quietly.

Souji looked over at him and exhaled, looking at me. "On my terms, not really. But I'm going to try, okay? For you." He replied, smiling his cat-smile for me and tousling my hair.

I quieted and nodded, smiling up at him. "Thank you, Souji." I lowered his hand from my head and went to Chizuru's side as she was mourning her father. "Chizu-chan," I began softly.

"K-Kawa-chan," she sniffed and looked at me, her brown eyes puffy; I smiled gently, folding an arm around her shoulders in a sisterly way as she wiped the tears from her eyes.

"The Shinsengumi just suffered a great loss: do you think you stand a chance in the upcoming battle?" Sannan-san wondered, making me look up to see he was talking with my brother.

"Noone fighting thinks we'll lose." Toshi replied as Souji smirked at his casual response.

Heisuke chuckled, "after all, you do hate to lose, neh Souji?" He looked at his friend.

"Damn straight, knowin' our Oni-Fukuchou." Souji elbowed him lightly.

"We were useless in this new era: we never should've created the Furies." Sannan-san mused sadly.

I patted her back gently and stood to my feet as Toshi's appearance changed back to normal, hair shifting from white to black, eyes from red to violet; I smiled at him, perking up sharply as Heisuke and Sannan-san collapsed.

"Heisuke!" Souji barked in surprise.

"Sannan-san!" Toshi declared.

Are their life-forces used up already? I wondered, trotting forward with Chizuru at my heels. "What's happening to you two?" I asked concernedly, crouching at Toshi's left as he knelt in front of them.

"It seems we've reached our limit," Sannan-san said quietly.

"Our lives are over." Heisuke agreed in the same tone.

My eyes widened slightly; "You've gotta be kidding me!" Souji began in disbelief.

"Did you know about this?" Toshi asked both of his fellow Furies, taking their hands in his own.

"Yeah," Heisuke replied weakly.

"The two of us may not have always seen eye-to-eye, but I always acknowledged your ability. I'm proud of how I got to fight alongside you in the Shinsengumi." Sannan-san admitted with a weak smile to my brother.

"Yeah, I am too, Sannan-san." Toshi agreed with a likewise-weak smile.

Heisuke smiled at him, "Hijikata-san, you have my thanks. You welcomed me back even though I abandoned you once."

Toshi chuckled quietly, "Everyone was worried about you, not just me; you're young, innocent, hot-headed!"

"Was I of some help in the end?" He wondered. "I! Relax and enjoy life, Hijikata-san."

He lowered his head and gritted his teeth, "Okay."

"I don't believe you; Hijikata-san, you're so quick-tempered." Heisuke chuckled weakly, trying at humor.

Toshi huffed, "don't be a jerk!"

"Heisuke," I began quietly, placing my free hand that wasn't holding onto Souji's on Toshi's shoulder.

He glanced over at me and smiled weakly, "Kawa-chan, do me a favor and look after Hijikata-san! And Souji, too. I know they need you! as much as you need them." He asked quietly.

I felt my throat slowly clog up with tears; I nodded, smiling at him. "I will."

"Yukimura-kun, I've hurt you so many times, haven't I?" Sannan-san turned to the tearful Chizuru; she shook her head fervently and placed her hands on Toshi's, looking down at the two men. "Please forgive me... and please take care of Hijikata-kun. Both you and

Yasakawa-kunâ€¦ Yasakawa-kun, I apologize for those times we had disagreementsâ€¦"

I shook my head, smiling a little and laughing weakly. "Forget about it, okay? I-I onlyâ€¦ I was stupid, to be so cross, for no apparent reason. I'm the one who should be apologizin', Sannan-san."

"You had every right, especially to be so protective of your brotherâ€¦ Both you and Okita-kun, find a happy ending." Sannan-san remarked quietly.

I nodded, smiling weakly. "Right!"

"Chizuru, keep a close eye on him. Don't let him rush through life." Heisuke chimed quietly, smiling up at her.

"Don't make that face; just smile, like always." Chizuru sniffed and cracked a weak smile.

"There you go; stay like thatâ€¦" He closed his eyes.

"Heisuke!" She cried as both he and Sannan-san turned gray before they burst into blue fire.

I gripped Toshi's shoulder before I released him and leaned onto Souji, closing my eyes tightly as he held me close.

Rest in peace, you two. Weâ€¦ we'll fight, for your memory!

:::::oOo:::::

The sword fell from my hands onto the floor.

"Toshi!" I barked as I jumped to my feet quickly, staring at him in disbelief.

His violet eyes were stern. "This is an order, Yasakawa. You and Souji are to stay hereâ€¦ Away from battle."

"Hijikata-san, we're not going to stay behind!" Souji snapped sharply, meeting his violet eyes and glaring.

I clenched my fists and glared at him. "I made promises too, just like you, Toshi. You can't shoulder this on your own, I won't let you. Souji and I talked, and we both decided to go with you to Ezo. We're going to fight with you as members of the Shinsengumi! Or don't you remember those days, when weâ€¦ when everyone was here? When we were willing to die for the sake of the family we'd created!?" My voice had risen to a shout.

"Kawa's right, we're staying with you, Hijikata-sanâ€¦ Even if it means we die before we reach that hilltop, at least we'll have carried on the name and pride of the Shinsengumi, and shed Satcho blood for that same damn reason! Kondou-sanâ€¦" Souji winced at the mention as I lowered my gaze. "Kondou-san entrusted Kawa, and me, and Chizuru-chan too, to keep you aliveâ€¦ Alive so that you could do what he didn't get to! So you're gonna have to go through me to leave to Ezo." He looked at him brazenly, his hand lowering to the hilt of his _katana_ out of reflex.

They held each other's stares for a long agonizing moment.

Toshi finally exhaled sharply, looking from him to me with stern eyes once again. "You're both as stubborn as ten mules!" Then this is a new order!" He scowled at me, his scowl softening briefly. "Keep close, and whatever the hell you do, don't die before we reach that hilltop."

Souji and I shared a look before we smiled and nodded. "_Hai, Oni-Fukuchou_." We replied in chorus.

Toshi nodded, smiling slightly. "We leave soon, so get ready." He added, turning to leave the room.

* * *

><p>AN: _again sorry for not updating sooner. life gets to you, y'know? anywho, the next chap will probably be the final one for this fic. i haven't covered eps 21 and 22 yet so i'll do that in the next chapter of 'Hanafubuki'. drop a review if y'want._

_**Toshi**__:_ *scowls at his sister* **review**.
thanks.

_**Kawa**__:_ *pokes him* baka, so emotionless! Dx onii-san requests that you review please~ thanks! ;D

End
file.